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The magazine of OPERA America — the national service organization for opera, which leads and serves the entire opera community, supporting the creation, presentation and enjoyment of opera.

- 5 **LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO**
- 6 **WHAT'S NEW**
- 12 **PEOPLE**
- 14 **OPERA AMERICA NEWS**
- 17 **GOING FOR THE GOLD:
LOS ANGELES OPERA ENTERS THE RING**
BY THOMAS MAY
- 22 **OLD MATERIALS, NEW EXPECTATIONS**
BY KELLEY ROURKE
- 27 **CO-OPERATING: THE CO-PRODUCING LANDSCAPE**
BY MELANIE FEILOTTER
- 34 **A CONVERSATION BETWEEN OPERA AMERICA PRESIDENT
AND CEO MARC A. SCORCA AND DESIGNER JOHN CONKLIN**
- 36 **PROJECTING THE FUTURE**
BY KELLEY ROURKE
- 43 **NATIONAL OPERA TRUSTEE RECOGNITION AWARDS**
- 46 **BEHIND THE NUMBERS**
- 53 **RECENTLY PUBLISHED**
BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL
- 55 **OPERA AMERICA COMMITTEES AND STAFF**
- 56 **HONOR ROLL OF DONORS**

ON THE COVER: Daniel Okulitch as Don Giovanni and Stefania Dovhan as Donna Anna in New York City Opera's 2009 production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, directed by Christopher Alden with design by Paul Steinberg (set), Terese Wadden (costume) and Jane Cox (lighting). Photo by Carol Rosegg.

In "Creative Connections with Opera.ca," which appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of *Opera America*, please note that the program is funded by the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation. The four participating companies in Creative Connections were Calgary Opera, Opera Hamilton (formerly known as Opera Ontario), Pacific Opera Victoria and Tapestry New Opera Works.

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publisher

OPERA America

editor

Kelley Rourke

associate editor

Alexa B. Antopol

art director

Katherine L. Ehle

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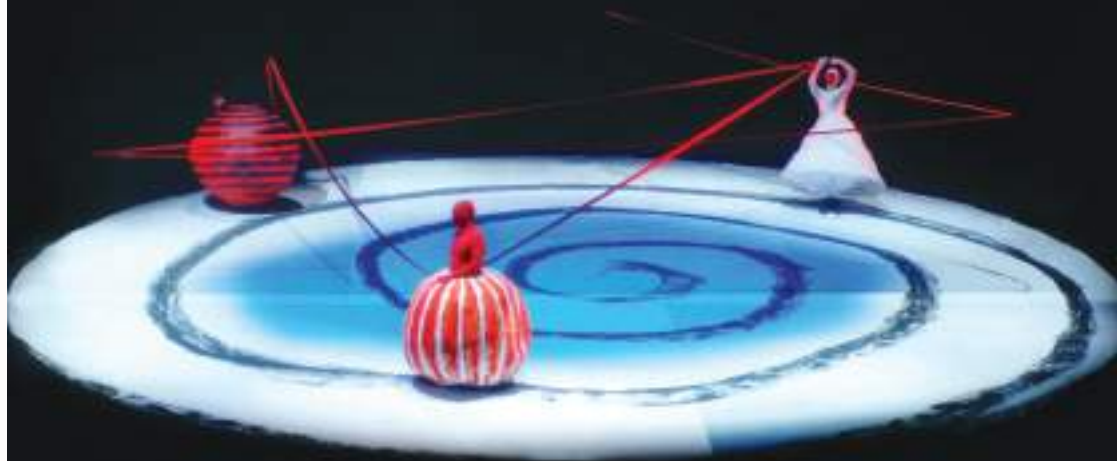
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In my keynote address to the Canadian Arts Summit in 2007, I explained that the absence of good research inhibits the nonprofit arts industry from realizing its full potential; important decisions frequently are made on the basis of theoretical conjecture or simple guesswork. It is pleasing to see that the volume of research across the field has actually increased in recent years, frequently at the insistence of board members who work in industries for which research is fundamental to the development of strategies. As the body of research increases, it is important to consider issues of context and methodology and to compare studies to discover the most useful findings.

In December, the National Endowment for the Arts released the 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). The survey reported a steep decline in almost all arts attendance since 2002, including opera attendance. The SPPA garnered a considerable amount of media attention, highlighting the need to examine the methodology of the survey and to consider it in comparison to other available data. Telephone interviews with more than 18,000 individuals asked adults to recall their attendance at arts events over the last 12 months and left it up to respondents to apply their own definitions to the terminology employed by the surveyors. What is opera? We know, for instance, that many audience members who attended performances of *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera* a decade ago believed they were attending an opera. Today, conservatories offer productions in downtown venues (sometimes featuring alumni with established careers) and opera companies perform on university campuses (sometimes using local graduate students in support roles). Which of these are considered to be professional opera performances? These are just a few of the questions that give rise to concern that the SPPA may not convey a complete picture of opera attendance.

OPERA America has a growing research capacity based in large part on nearly four decades of data submitted by member opera companies through the Professional Opera Survey. Based on actual ticket sales from a constant sample group of companies that have submitted data every year over 20 years, OPERA America is able to provide additional analysis. Yes, ticket sales have declined in recent seasons — by seven percent since 2002 in comparison to the 27 percent posited by the SPPA. However, over the 20 years from 1988 to 2002, tickets sales have risen 18 percent, even after the recent declines. We must work together to reverse the recent trends, but this work will take place in the context of significant gains over the last 20 years.

The charts that begin on page 46 of this issue of *Opera America Magazine* reveal other interesting findings. Income from ticket sales has increased 202 percent over the 20-year period from 1988 to 2008. While we may be pleased to see this significant increase in income, opera leaders must question the long-term impact of increased ticket prices. Have ticket price increases contributed to the decline in ticket sales over the last six years?

Contributions have also increased since 2001, by a healthy 62 percent. Happily, among the companies in the Constant Sample Group, income growth has outpaced increases in expenses over the years from 2001 to 2008 resulting in parallel increases in permanently restricted net assets and total assets.

Research is important and OPERA America is the most reliable source of national trend analysis about the field. This capacity to collect, organize and analyze data is one of the prime services of OPERA America and requests for research assistance are always welcome.

Marc A. Scorca
President/CEO

"IT HAS TAKEN OFF LIKE WILDFIRE."

An intimate, acoustically perfect historic theater, a beautiful setting, an enthusiastic audience — any singer would be glad to perform under these conditions. When bass-baritone Taras Kulish was engaged by the Green Mountain Cultural Center to give a concert, the audience's enthusiasm suggested a real hunger for opera. "When I saw the Barre Opera House, I said, we have to do productions here. I proposed that we start a full-fledged opera festival. We got a big sponsorship from the Sheila C. Johnson Foundation, and it has taken off like wildfire."

The festival is based in Waitsfield and the productions take place in Barre, both in central Vermont, a 40-minute drive from Burlington. Each town's population is only about 5,000, but since the Mad River Valley area draws many tourists during the skiing season, there is ample accommodation for visiting opera lovers. "People think of farming when they think of Vermont, but there is also a large part of the population that is artistic, affluent and educated, people who come from big cities to enjoy the quiet setting."

Green Mountain Opera Festival, one of OPERA America's newest Professional Company Members, has sold out every performance since its inception and has quadrupled its budget since 2006, says Kulish, who is the company's artistic director. He attributes the company's success, in part, to its low overhead. "It's me, a part-time artistic administrator and many hard-working volunteers. Seventy-five percent of our budget goes to what you see on the stage." The fact that Kulish maintains an active singing career is helpful, since he is able to enlist many of his colleagues in what is otherwise something of a dead spot in the opera calendar.

The company's three-and-a-half week June season includes two operas — one with established professionals and one featuring members of the company's young artist program. Here, too, the company has seen tremendous growth, with over 300 applications this season. Kulish is able to use his connections to bring in seasoned performers to work with the emerging artists — this year, Sanford Sylvan will coach and direct a production of Handel's *Orlando*.

Kulish may have realized Central Vermont's potential from the stage, but it's not a place he plans to revisit any time soon: "While I have done some singing at fundraisers, I can't imagine having any energy left to even consider singing during the festival. I'd rather take my singer hat off and make sure my artistic director hat is on and well-anchored. I have to say I'm very proud of what we've accomplished so far." 🍷



The "Picnic in the Pastures," a very popular outdoor concert/picnic event at the Green Mountain Opera Festival. Photo by Spencer Leonard.



Martin T. Lopez's sketch, Amazon River Water Dancers, from Catán's *Florencia en el Amazonas*.

“GETTING NEW PRODUCTIONS OF WORKS THAT HAVE ONLY HAD A COUPLE OF PERFORMANCES IS SO IMPORTANT.”

Last year, OPERA America hosted its first ever **Director-Designer Showcase** as part of a continuing effort to foster emerging opera artists. The Showcase, presented under the auspices of *The Opera Fund*, is intended to bring new talent to the forefront and connect promising directors and designers with those who are in a position to hire them.

Fort Worth Opera General Director Darren Keith Woods was among the professionals who adjudicated the more than 40 entries, selecting four to be presented at *Opera Conference 2009*. “I was trying to look at the applications with the voice of reason, to see if the productions were feasible. I didn’t anticipate that I would fall in love with one of them.”

That one was *Florencia en el Amazonas*, with a production by director Lawrence Edelson, designers Martin T. Lopez and Josh Epstein, and choreographer Lauri Stallings, which has been scheduled for Fort Worth Opera’s 2012 season. The detailed presentation made it easier for Woods to approach potential co-producers; at this point both The Atlanta Opera and Utah Symphony | Utah Opera are in discussions about bringing the show to their audiences. “Getting new productions of works that have only had a couple of performances is so important,” says Woods. “A new team can say something different about a piece that we thought we already knew.” 🍷

“IF AN OUTSIDER CAME IN TO START AN OPERA COMPANY, IT WOULDN’T HAPPEN.”

Sugar Creek Symphony & Song, a summer opera festival held the first full weekend of August each year in Watseka, IL, was recently welcomed as a Professional Company Member of OPERA America. The company’s goal is to bring the arts out of the city and into the countryside, create cultural and educational opportunities, attract tourism to the area and build exciting arts events for audiences.

“Watsseka is 90 miles south of Chicago, with a population of about 6,000. When I was growing up, there were a lot of factories, but now there are fewer factories, fewer jobs,” says General & Artistic Director Helen Todd. “I never heard a live orchestra until I went to college as a voice major. Most people here had never seen an opera until we started the festival.” Along with colleague John Whitman, Todd founded the company in 2002.

Todd juggles her responsibilities with an active performing career. Particularly in the first few seasons of the festival, the soprano’s onstage participation has been an important draw for audience members, many of whom had watched her grow up.

Todd’s professional performances outside Watseka are an opportunity to scout for talent for the festival. “I look for not just good singers but people who are going to be comfortable here. The audience is four feet away, so it is important to have colleagues who are singing actors, who can just fall into their characters. For most of our audience, this is the first opera they will ever see, and maybe the last. I want it to be the absolute best.”

The company relies on the assistance of volunteers for a number of tasks, from housing seasonal staff to selling tickets. “It’s a full-time job for some of them, a real labor of love,” says Todd. “For retirees in a community like this, there isn’t much to do. Even people who didn’t know anything about opera wanted to help make a good name for the community. Most people are lifelong residents. If an outsider came in to start an opera company, it wouldn’t happen. A small town is like an extended family, and if we want to survive, we have to do it together. We love this little town.” 🍷



Mark Thomsen, Jeff Mattsey, Mikolaj Zalasinski and Peter Volpe in Sugar Creek Symphony & Song’s performance of Verdi’s *La traviata*. Photo © Heins Studio.

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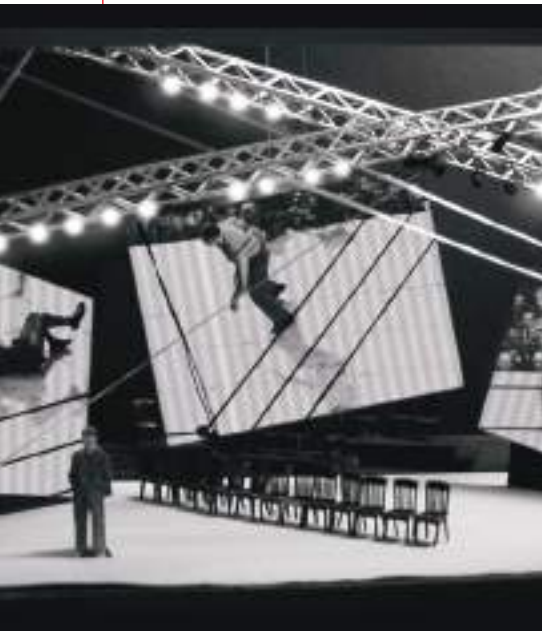
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Set and projection designs for Maryland Opera Studio's upcoming world premiere production of Proto's *Shadowboxer*. Set design by Erhard Rom and projection design by Kirby Malone and Gail Scott White.



Jake Heggie (at the piano) leads a workshop in San Francisco for The Dallas Opera's world premiere production of Heggie's *Moby-Dick*. Photo by Karen Almond, The Dallas Opera.



Seattle Opera's *Amelia* season production image with background photos courtesy of Gardner McFall and foreground photo of Kate Lindsey Photo by Rozarii Lynch.

COMING SOON TO AN OPERA HOUSE NEAR YOU

A number of world premieres are scheduled for the coming months.

Shadowboxer

Frank Proto/John Chenault
Maryland Opera Studio
April 17, 18, 21, 23, 25, 2010

Boxing great Joe Louis — “The Brown Bomber” — became a hero to the whole country in an era when a black hero was all but unthinkable. But what happens to a hero when the glory fades and the bills come due?

Moby-Dick

Jake Heggie/Gene Scheer
The Dallas Opera
April 30, May 5, 8, 13, 16, 2010

Based on Herman Melville’s sprawling 19th-century literary masterpiece, *Moby-Dick* is filled with mysterious encounters, exotic characters and one man’s quest for a white whale that leaves death and destruction in its wake.

Amelia

Daron Aric Hagon/Gardner McFall/Stephen Wadsworth
Seattle Opera
May 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 2010

Amelia interweaves one woman’s emotional journey, the American experience in Vietnam and elements of the Daedalus and Icarus myth to explore man’s fascination with flight and the dilemmas that arise when vehicles of flight are used for exploration, adventure and war.



Wes Mason, a young artist at the Seagle Music Colony, is pictured singing the part of Reinaldo in the workshop of Martín's *Before Night Falls*. Photo by Ellen Appel.



Andrew Drost as Augustus Gloop in American Lyric Theater's Workshop of Ash's *The Golden Ticket*. Drost will create the role of Augustus in the world premiere at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Photo by Michael Chadwick.



Costume sketches for the role of Segismundo (to be sung by Roger Honeywell) in The Santa Fe Opera's upcoming world premiere production of Spratlan's *Life is a Dream*. Costume design by Jessica Jahn.

Before Night Falls

Jorge Martín

Fort Worth Opera

May 29 and June 6, 2010

Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas' memoir *Before Night Falls* served as the source for this opera about a Cuban counter-revolutionary and homosexual, prosecuted by the state for having his manuscripts published outside Cuba.

The Golden Ticket

Peter Ash/Donald Sturrock

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis

June 13, 16, 18, 22, 24, 26, 2010

Based on Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Golden Ticket* layers fantasy and comedy in a fable about the power of generosity and fearless imagination.

Life Is a Dream

Lewis Spratlan/James Maraniss

The Santa Fe Opera

July 24, 28 and August 6, 12, 19

Based on Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*, often cited as the *Hamlet* of Spanish literature, this Pulitzer Prize-winning opera explores provocative questions about the nature of perception and reality. 🎭

Kevin Mynatt has joined **Florida Grand Opera** (FGO) as director of production. Mynatt served as director of production at Portland Opera for seven years, following four years at Opera Omaha as production manager-resident lighting/technical director. His last position was managing director of Central City Opera (Denver, CO).

Tracy Lee Glenn joined the staff of **Opera Cleveland** on January 28 as director of development. A Cleveland native, Glenn most recently served as program director of the International House of Blues Foundation in Cleveland. During her tenure there, she garnered support from McNally-Smith College of Music, Emerson Charitable Trust, the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation and developed partnerships with corporate and community organizations. She holds a B.A. in sociology and a M.A. in teaching from Kent State University.

Sarah Rhorer has accepted the position of director of education and community programming at Opera Columbus. She holds a degree in music education from Ohio University, a Master's degree in voice performance from Ohio State University and has taught in the public school system. Rhorer has been an artist in numerous Opera Columbus programs, including Opera Columbus On The Go, residency programs and Improv Opera. She is also a member of the Opera Columbus Chorus. Former Director of Education and Community Programming **Eric McKeever** has left the company for a role in a touring production of *Porgy and Bess*.

Opera New Jersey has announced the appointment of **David M. Wax** as interim executive director. He will oversee the general administration of the Garden State's largest opera company following the departure of founders Scott and Lisa Altman. Institutions he has led have included: Houston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, San Antonio Symphony, Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and Music School and Sacramento Symphony. He holds both a Master's and Ph.D. from Harvard University in political science.

Now in its fifth season, **Opera on the James** welcomes its first executive director, **Cecelia Schieve**, who joined the leadership team of Board President David Neumeyer and Artistic Director Craig Fields on January 1, 2010. Schieve's recent positions have included director of young artist and education program at Florida Grand Opera, opera education consultant for the Miami-Dade School District, assistant general director of Anchorage Opera, executive director of Brown Bag Opera (Boston, MA) and director of opera at Boston Conservatory. An active stage director, she most recently directed *The Marriage of Figaro* at Ash Lawn Opera last season.

Heather Kemp will join **The Santa Fe Opera** staff as director of finance & accounting beginning March 17, 2010. Previously, Kemp held the position of director of finance at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), and she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise about the business of opera. Prior to that, Kemp worked for the public

accounting firm of Rubin, Brown, & Gornstein, and for four years was a member of OTSL's audit team. Kemp holds a B.S. and M.S. in accounting from Truman State University, and is a licensed CPA.

Vancouver Opera (VO) has intensified its commitment to developing community engagement and infrastructure through cutting-edge technologies with two staff appointments in the areas of social media and information technology. **Ling Chan** has been promoted to the newly-created position of social media manager and **Hali Autio** has been promoted to director of information technology. Since joining VO in 2007 as an executive assistant, Chan has been responsible for many social media marketing innovations, including Blogger Night @ The Opera, an idea that subsequently has been adopted by opera companies worldwide. Autio joined VO in 2004 and since then, as manager of information technology, has worked to advance and improve VO's technological infrastructure.

Cal Performances, the UC Berkeley-based performing arts presenting and commissioning organization, has named **Eric Stensvaag** to the position of director of development. Prior to this appointment, Stensvaag served as director of corporate gifts at the San Francisco Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony's associate director of institutional gifts, and The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts's manager of major gifts and grants & sponsorship. Stensvaag graduated cum laude from St. Olaf College with a B.A. in music.

Italian conductor **Alberto Veronesi** has been appointed music director of **Opera Orchestra of New York**, effective in the 2011-2012 season. Veronesi will succeed founder Eve Queler, who will become conductor laureate once Veronesi's initial five-year tenure begins. Veronesi is currently music director of the Puccini Festival at Torre del Lago, artistic director of the Filarmonica del Teatro Comunale di Bologna,

and music director of the Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana.

FTM ARTS LAW has been chosen by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters as the 2010 Recipient of the **Sidney R. Yates Advocacy Award**. FTM ARTS LAW, a division of Fettmann, Tolchin & Majors, PC, is comprised of Jonathan Ginsburg, Brian Taylor Goldstein, Robyn Guilliams and Andi Floyd.

The firm was selected for the award in recognition of its successful advocacy efforts to improve the process by which foreign artists and performers obtain visas and work authorization to enter the U.S.; its acclaimed workshops and seminars proving basic legal knowledge and business skills to artists and arts professionals; and the fundamental impact of its work on the arts industry. 🌟

IN MEMORIAM

Ann Craft, who served as the president of Opera Guilds International from 1991-1994, passed away on Tuesday, February 2, 2010. Craft was born June 19, 1932 in Valdosta, GA and grew up in San Marcos, TX. She graduated from San Marcos High School and the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in music education. She taught school for two years in Corpus Christi, TX and Houston, TX, where she lived for 47 years. She was a loving wife and mother who all her life spread joy to everyone she met. She was an active member and leader of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Bluebird Circle, Chi Omega Sorority, Bayou Bend Docents Organization and Houston Country Club; president of Houston Theta Mothers Club; and trustee and executive committee member of The Open Door Mission Foundation, where she chaired many special events on the Mission's behalf. The Houston Grand Opera along with The Open Door Mission Foundation were her special interests. She was a life trustee of Houston Grand Opera and has served as Opera Guild president, chair of the Opera Ball, member of the Presidents Council and chair of the Pavarotti Recital. She was a long-time member of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Houston and she sang in the choir, led the children's choir and served on the Docent Committee of the Church. She chaired the dedication of the "Gloria Dei" organ in the new church. She will be deeply missed.

Perry Lorenzo, who served as director of education at Seattle Opera for nearly 20 years, passed away on December 19, 2009, after a seven-month battle with lung cancer. He was 51. Born in Hawaii and raised in Bellingham, WA, Lorenzo graduated from Gonzaga University in Spokane. After spending a short time in the Catholic Seminary there, he decided to become a teacher. For 10 years he taught at Kennedy High School in Burien. Lorenzo took a fledgling education program at Seattle Opera and expanded it exponentially. Under his leadership, Seattle Opera instituted a system of preparing the 700 high school students who attend dress rehearsals. Lorenzo launched the company's young artists program in 1998, and encouraged the program's expansion and its annual full-scale production in Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue. From New York to San Francisco — and in many cities in between — he spoke on the *Ring* (every Seattle Opera performance of which he had attended from 1975 until he became ill), other Wagner operas, and on other opera and symphonic subjects. A devout Catholic, he wrote on religious matters as well as operatic. His dedication to Catholicism and his ability to introduce his religion into his lectures became a hallmark of his work. At St. James Cathedral he was very active as a parishioner and teacher. He advocated ecumenism and frequently moderated panels with members of all faiths. He also gave many popular and well-attended lecture courses at Seattle University. His final line in his opera lectures was always the same: "It's a romantic story, fabulous music and one swell night in the theater."



Students from Irwin Park Elementary, West Vancouver, B.C. participate in the original opera *The Amazing Salmon Tale*. Photo by Alex Waterhouse-Hayward and courtesy of Vancouver Opera.

MUSIC! WORDS! OPERA! 2010 TEACHER WORKSHOPS

OPERA America is pleased to announce *Music! Words! Opera! (M!W!O!)* teacher training workshops scheduled for summer 2010. During a week-long immersion in the K-12 curriculum series, teachers experience the same process they will undertake with their students — they learn about opera through the study of a great work and then apply that knowledge to create an original opera. In addition, workshops highlight ways that educators can relate opera to other subjects, paying particular attention to the subject area standards. There is also a strong focus on assessment and evaluation.

Summer workshops for 2010 are currently scheduled in the following locations:

- June 7 – 11, 2010, Saint Louis, MO
Sponsored by **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis**
- June 28 – July 2, 2010, Indianapolis, IN
Sponsored by **Indianapolis Opera**
- July 5 – 9, 2010, Denver, CO
Sponsored by **Central City Opera**
- July 26 – 30, 2010, Salt Lake City, UT
Sponsored by **Utah Symphony | Utah Opera**
- August 2 – August 6, 2010, Fort Worth, TX
Sponsored by **Fort Worth Opera**

M!W!O! provides opera companies and organizations new opportunities to connect with local educators. To learn more about attending or hosting a workshop, please contact Evan Wildstein, manager of education, at 212-796-8620 or Education@operaamerica.org.

Visit www.operaamerica.org/mwo for more information and for other workshop locations/dates. 


NORTH AMERICAN OPERA JOURNAL GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

OPERA America invites submissions to the *North American Opera Journal*, a new peer-reviewed, semi-annual online journal for scholarship about North American opera that features high-quality research with multimedia elements. The *Journal* is the first to support scholarly work specific to the field of opera in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Submissions are invited from all scholars regardless of nationality or academic affiliation. Although length of submissions should not exceed 8,000 words plus other media, more concise articles are welcomed.

While the journal will cover all aspects of opera production in North America, topics should be centered on composition and performance histories of North American operas. The *Journal* will be targeted at readers interested in musicological and historical issues, and singers and other professionals involved in opera production. Articles may engage in issues of:

- History
- Aesthetics
- Cultural/interdisciplinary studies
- Business of opera
- Music and libretto composition
- Production
- Reception history
- Performance practice

The deadline for submissions is April 30, 2010. Visit www.operaamerica.org/content/pubs/journal.aspx for more information. 

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Going for the Gold: Los Angeles Opera Enters the *Ring*

By Thomas May





Denyce Graves as Marguerite and Paul Groves as Faust with gnomes in Los Angeles Opera's production of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust*; directed by Achim Freyer.

Nearly 134 years have passed since the first complete staging of the *Ring*. Yet Wagner's mighty cycle remains one of the ultimate tests — and defining moments — for an opera company. Now comes Los Angeles Opera's turn. Years of planning — including two seasons to roll out its first-ever production of the work piece by piece — culminate this May-June in three complete cycles, accompanied by a city-wide *Ring* Festival of related symposia and performances involving 100 different artistic partners. The creation of the *Ring* was the biggest gamble of Wagner's own career, after all, and its afterlife as a work of art has been pervaded by a similar sense of risk. Despite advances in theater technology which even the forward-thinking Wagner could scarcely imagine, any new production has to come to terms afresh with the essential artistic challenges of the *Ring*. The sheer magnitude of the process has a way of transforming everyone involved. James Conlon, Los Angeles Opera's music director, recalls telling the orchestra when rehearsals first got under way: "When you come back

to *Das Rheingold*, by the time you're done with *Götterdämmerung*, it will strike you that what seemed terribly difficult and complex at the beginning will now feel relatively easy."

Conlon goes on to observe that the *Ring* festival will mark "an important moment for the city of Los Angeles and for those who deeply value presence of classical culture in general." He clearly revels in the opportunity. Although Conlon conducted one-and-a-half cycles in his previous posts in Cologne and

Paris, this is the first time he's been involved with a new, completely staged *Ring* production "from beginning to end." In fact, Conlon made that a condition when he accepted general director Plácido Domingo's offer to join the company in 2006.

Los Angeles Opera (which has yet to celebrate its 25th anniversary) is banking on boosting its profile and artistic status with this first *Ring*. "For our first *Ring* out," says Christopher Koelsch, the company's vice president of artistic planning, "we could have partnered with another company or simply imported a pre-existing production. But we decided we needed a calling card that would represent the artistic ambitions of the company."

The company's inaugural *Ring* has in fact been incubating for some time. Before Domingo came on board in 2000, Los Angeles Opera had planned to team up with director George Lucas and his special effects company, Industrial Light & Magic, for a production that was quickly dubbed "the Star Wars *Ring*." The projected price tag, though, eventually came to a dizzying \$60-something million, and the production never made it beyond initial discussions. Meanwhile, the company had been dazzled

In conjunction with Los Angeles Opera's first complete staging of the cycle and *Opera Conference 2010* in Los Angeles, Thomas May will lead a special interactive exploration of Wagner's *Ring* Cycle, beginning April 6. This course will provide a comprehensive entry into the complex, labyrinthine and endlessly fascinating world that Wagner created through his extraordinary synthesis of the arts. In keeping with the *Ring*'s scope, this course will offer eight full lectures, covering: background on Wagner, his musical methods and mythological sources; the history of *Ring* productions; and individual introductions to each of the cycle's four operas. The course is free for OPERA America members; visit www.operaamerica.org for more information.



James Conlon. Photo courtesy of Los Angeles Opera.

by their first taste of the work of German director Achim Freyer in the early part of the decade: first, in a controversial staging of Bach's B minor Mass in 2002, followed by a richly imaginative production of Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* in Domingo's inaugural season as general director.

"He showed an extraordinary facility for storytelling," Koelsch remarks. "In the case of the Bach, here he was taking this piece clearly not meant even to be staged and developing a stage life that was clear to the audience and artistically beautiful. That's when it first began to occur to us that Achim would be ideal as the director of our *Ring*." But Freyer, now 75, considered himself retired from the stage and

initially declined the invitation to take on such a massive commitment. Edgar Baitzel, the company's late chief operating officer (who died in 2007), had worked with Freyer over many years via his connections with European opera houses. Eventually he persuaded Freyer to accept.

Clearly, the company opted for a daring and unexpected approach by engaging Freyer. The director considers himself primarily a painter and designer and was once a star protégé of Bertolt Brecht. Freyer is hardly one to leave a tepid impression: His surreal but indelible stage vocabulary provokes animated discussion. The vision that has been slowly coalescing over the past few years for his staging has a dreamlike, haunting grip that

seems especially well-suited to the *Ring*'s cyclical structure, with its recurring elements (not only musical but dramatic as well). Los Angeles Opera found it so compelling that it committed whole-heartedly to making this *Ring* happen, despite the sudden downturn in the economy and the production's \$32 million budget.

To date, Freyer's stagings of the first three *Ring* music dramas have been performed, with *Götterdämmerung* to be revealed this April. Along with the stage direction, his work extends to all the visual elements: the set, costume and lighting design (he partners with his daughter Amanda in designing the costumes — featuring a mix of puppetry and whimsical, fairytale-like hyperbole — and with Brian Gale for the lighting). How does this fit into Los Angeles Opera's sense of a company aesthetic? "We have developed a reputation for doing productions with unconventional artists in unconventional ways," explains Koelsch. "And growing familiarity with something new makes audiences less anxious. But it's an ongoing dilemma in the opera house: If you take a traditional approach, then another portion of the audience gets upset. In the end, you have to aim for what seems the best artistic manner, and then let it go, acknowledging that no matter what, a small portion of the audience will be upset."

Says Koelsch: "Achim isn't afraid of the bold theatrical gesture or of infusing and exaggerating the artificiality of form: He hyperbolizes it. That's very helpful in dealing with myth and legend, where you're not supposed to see yourself as in a domestic story. His art works on a gigantic scale. There's a lot of pleasure to be derived from his overlay of interpretation."

For all his radicalism, Freyer is anything but an iconoclast. His core impulses are those of a painter, and for the Los Angeles *Ring* he has evolved an iconography that mirrors the organic connections of Wagner's intricate musical web of motifs and associations. Strange and surreal they are — including such signature images as Wotan's disembodied eye, a squeezebox rainbow, Fricka's absurdly extended arms, a kind of racetrack in *Siegfried* — yet Freyer's visual vocabulary is not arbitrary. Like a shadow that looms larger by the hour, it gains in suggestive power as the cycle progresses. "In this *Ring*," writes Alan Rich, one of its most perceptive critics, "sight and sound blend into one further dimension, toward an interlock of the senses."


Even more, this isn't just another trendily "updated" *Ring*. Indeed, this *Ring* sets itself apart from the kinds of productions that are often dismissed as "concept" or "director's" opera. Freyer has no interest in shrink-wrapping the complex and many-layered elements of Wagner's *Ring* to make them suit a preordained framework. By the same token, he entirely avoids the comfortably disarming brand of psychological realism (itself a "concept") that tames Wagner's inexhaustible vision, domesticating it into a family drama. Freyer's elusive repertory of symbols — his geometric imagery of circles, lines and spirals on a steeply raked rotating disc — represents his counterpoint to the *Ring's* mythological cosmos. "Timelessness was Wagner's dictum for the *Ring*," says Freyer, adopting it as his own *modus operandi*.

Conlon agrees that the precept of timelessness is essential "if the work is to speak with its full power." He opposes the "specificity" of many productions that became fashionable since the *Ring's* centennial because

"they tend to reduce the mythic power of the cycle to a particular intellectual concept." But one thing above all has impressed the conductor about Freyer: "You can find lots of superficiality and ignorance in the opera world masquerading as genius. But Achim is an artist who really thinks deeply about this work. Whereas I might not agree with every detail, I certainly find the overall vision compelling."

At the same time, Conlon emphasizes that "the composer is the greatest dramatist," pointing to the lazy habit of tagging a particular production with the director's name. Indeed, most of the coverage thus far of the Los Angeles *Ring* has been heavily weighted toward its visual dimension — which is, after all, easier to describe than musical performance — and reflects the bias in our increasingly visually oriented culture. Speaking more generally of a nation that long ago abandoned musical education, Conlon refers to the persistent problem of music becoming "the background to what we do, part of the fabric of our lives only on a secondary level. My

hope is to see opera performances go in a way that takes that visual orientation and reintegrates it with a higher demand for vocal artistry and first-rate dramatic performances coming from the conductor and orchestra alike."

The *Ring* could hardly have earned its prestige if there were a one-size-fits-all solution to performing it. Ironically, its iconic status makes it easy to forget that Wagner's epic began as a radical gesture opposing the conventions of his era. Conlon remains firmly convinced that we can still find it a source of rejuvenation: "Despite the fact that it's the most expensive endeavor to produce and makes the greatest demand of our resources, the *Ring* should be a permanent part of the landscape of American music making. When people come to love the *Ring* they never leave it. It is an intoxicating experience, in a healthy sense, to try to plumb to the depths of something that simply has no bottom, top or sides." 

Thomas May is a frequent contributor to OPERA America's magazine.



Gordon Hawkins as Alberich, Stacey Tappan as Woglinde, Beth Clayton as Fosskilde and Lauren McNeese as Wellgunde in Los Angeles Opera's 2008-2009 production of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. Photo by Monika Rittershaus.

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Old Materials,

New production or rental? When time and money are tight, the latter might seem the most responsible choice. But as consumers' discretionary funds dwindle, it is more important than ever for opera companies to establish a compelling artistic identity. The good news: fiscal responsibility and artistic innovation don't have to be mutually exclusive. By bringing artists into the conversation, some producers are finding a way to both conserve resources and make a splash.

"Cleveland has been in a recession for many years, which has had an impact on the entire arts community," says William Cole, executive director of Opera Cleveland. "As a result of those challenges, we have had to become a very transparent company. We have to have very honest

conversations in which you check your pride at the door. So much of the arts world is cloak and dagger. Now I'm seeing more people who are willing to sit in a room and ask, 'What can we do for this amount of money?' You have to let your guard down and have real honest conversations with your partners. I'm very optimistic, as long as everyone comes to the table understanding that we can't let old expectations guide the way we do opera today."

For an upcoming production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Opera Cleveland, Erhard Rom is modifying a set he designed for *Macbeth* at Lyric Opera of Kansas City. "Sometimes a situation forces people to stop and rethink," says Rom. "This can be seen as a positive thing. Dean Williamson, the artistic director at Opera Cleveland, is trying very hard not just to rent everything, but to find



Donald Eastman's set model for *Death in Venice* (photo by Robert Wierzel). Eastman later reworked the same set for Copland's *The Tender Land*, Handel's *Tolomeo* and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* (model photos by Gabriel Oshen); as well as Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Puccini's *Tosca* (not pictured)..

New Expectations

By Kelley Rourke

people who can make something interesting happen onstage. But it is a slippery slope — where is the fine line between interesting conceptual ideas that can be shaped from existing scenery and just putting stuff out there, decorating the stage with meaningless imagery?”

Esther Nelson, who became general and artistic director of Boston Lyric Opera in 2008, was eager to signal a new direction for the company, despite the fact that the 2008-2009 season was already planned. “We had a rental production of *Don Giovanni* signed up, and I didn’t think it was the best approach for the *Giovanni* I had in mind. I looked around but I couldn’t find with anything I liked better, so I made a decision to have a black box approach. Not every opera is suitable for that kind of approach, but I

think *Giovanni* is. Besides my complete faith in the music, I felt it was an opera about the dynamics between people, one that could be done with very little.”

She contacted director Tazewell Thompson, who began talking to Donald Eastman, a designer and long time collaborator of his. Unbeknownst to Thompson, Eastman had a *Giovanni* idea ready to go: “A year ago, City Opera sent this letter to me saying that they were looking at selling several of the productions from their warehouse and our *Death in Venice* was one of them. I kept thinking



there had to be something else you could use that set for that could make purchasing it more viable — it is eternal, classical architecture, tempered with emotional inky blackness. Then the *Giovanni* light bulb turned on.”

A rigorous creative process is essential to the success of any production, regardless of budget. “You can be very literal about why something might work: *Macbeth* and *Lucia* both take place in Scotland, but that sort of obvious reference isn’t really the point,” says Rom. “The point is that the space seemed like it could lend itself to transformations on a more psychological level. When you fill the stage with lots of elaborate scenery you’re often telling the audience this is where we are, and that’s not as interesting to me. When you’re faced with a situation where you can’t illustrate a location, directors and designers and opera companies have to think about what the design can be beyond that. You have to think about what the piece is really about, what you are really trying to say. The environment takes on more importance. It becomes a major player in the storytelling.”

Repurposing “found” materials is one creative approach to maximizing resources. Edmonton Opera took a slightly different approach: the company asked designer Peter Dean Beck to create a set that could initially be used for *Don Giovanni*, and subsequently used as the basis for

other productions. It consists of a center raked platform, side units with two levels and an upstage unit, all of which can take different facades. To date, *Otello*, *Falstaff*, *HMS Pinafore* and *Abduction from the Seraglio* facades have been constructed. “We had used the designer before, and we trust him implicitly,” says General Manager Mary Phillips-Rickey. “He has been very economical in terms of giving us good quality and making sets that are eminently usable.”

According to Phillips-Rickey, the re-use of the major set elements has been imperceptible to the audience. By planning ahead, the company was able to get five new productions for far less than the cost of renting and shipping five existing productions. The stagehands’ growing familiarity with the set has helped the company realize additional savings, she says: “Our load in is faster. The crew says, ‘This one again. What goes on the front this time?’”

Eastman will take a similar approach this summer when he returns to the *Death in Venice* set to create not one but four visually distinct productions for the 2010 Glimmerglass Opera season. The operas — *Tosca*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Tender Land*, *Tolomeo* — will employ selected elements in varied configurations, along with some newly-constructed facades and furniture. Eastman’s clever scheme will allow the company to cut their scenery expenses by



A single set served as the starting point for productions of Verdi’s *Otello* (Opera de Québec), Verdi’s *Falstaff* (Edmonton Opera), Sullivan’s *HMS Pinafore* (Edmonton Opera) and Mozart’s *Abduction from the Seraglio* (Hawaii Opera Theatre). All photos courtesy of Edmonton Opera.

60-75 percent this season. Because the footprint of each production is similar, the company can make better use of its lighting budget, as well.

While existing materials can sometimes be transformed effectively, it is not a solution that will work in every circumstance. Rom had already reworked a number of scenery pieces from other shows he had designed for Cleveland when *Lucia* discussions began. "It came to a point where I had to say to Dean, 'I feel like I've used up what I can in your warehouse in terms of making something meaningful.' So I recommended they buy this set from Kansas City. It was less expensive than building new, but it wasn't completely free of charge."

In each of the examples described above, the original designer was an active participant in the "new" production. Contractual stipulations aside, Nelson feels the involvement of the original creative team leads to a better result. "They are far more familiar with the production, and they know what changes can be made in the spirit of the production. Forget the legal questions, it is ideal for the ultimate outcome if you can get the same team. We were also able to have Robert Wierzel come back to light *Don Giovanni*, which was ideal because he knew the set and its challenges well."

Even if a producer is tempted to pull a single element from stock, says Eastman, the original designer should be consulted: "You might think it's just a wall, but there is a designer who decided to make that wall 23 feet high, not 16 feet or 26 feet high, and the reason you want to use it is because it is a beautiful thing. You don't want to see that destroyed by someone with a different or downright terrible sense of proportion. For the 2010 season, all the scenery I'm re-purposing is my own. If we found a unique prop or piece of scenery in the warehouse and wanted to use it, we would contact that designer."

"If we are thinking of modifying something, who better to address that than the designer?" asks Nelson. "I don't design sets. I don't design costumes. They do. One may argue there is a risk in that designers might be too hooked on their original ideas and find it difficult to adjust. I haven't found that to be the case."

Rom has had experiences where a producer comes to him with an idea for re-use that focuses on surface similarities. "What seems to work better is when a designer has an idea about how something could be transformed," he says. "It's about finding the essence of the piece — what you need to tell the story. But it's not just taking away what you don't need, either. It's not just saying you don't need a cathedral



to do *Tosca*. It is finding a space that is interesting, that makes the story seem fresh. *Death in Venice* to *Don Giovanni* was not an obvious leap, but it worked.”

This new way of working is not without its complications. Clayton Rodney, technical director of Opera Edmonton, stresses the importance of keeping very good records so that each of the five productions can maintain its integrity. Phillips-Rickey notes, “We now have five productions in our warehouse that share elements, so none of them can go out at the same time. Clayton is very strict about not letting us borrow elements from rental productions.”

At Boston Lyric Opera, the team that created *Orphée et Eurydice* for Glimmerglass Opera has been engaged to create a new production of *Idomeneo* using the same sets and costumes. However, with future rentals of the *Orphée* production already booked, the team cannot make any permanent alterations to the materials.

Challenges aside, these companies have demonstrated ways that conversations with artists can lead to creative solutions in a difficult economy. In some instances, these new approaches have had additional positive implications. By choosing to build a new multi-purpose set, rather than rely on rentals from other opera companies, Edmonton Opera has shown how the arts can contribute to the local economy. “It really has given work to people in Alberta — carpenters, crafts people, material suppliers. That’s hundreds and thousands of dollars that went right back into our community.”

In Cleveland, the recycled *Macbeth/Lucia* set kicked off a company-wide green initiative. “Companies, whether for-profit or nonprofit, tend to reflect the values of the people that work there,” says Cole. “Opera Cleveland has a young, energetic, earth-caring staff. Many of them are committed to recycling and sustainability in their personal lives, and it has really permeated the culture of the company.” The purchase of a set that was otherwise headed to a landfill provided the perfect opportunity for the company to formalize its commitment to the environment. This summer, the company signed a contract with Philips Healthcare to make use of its wood waste, and Rom is tailoring his modifications to an existing set to make exclusive use of these reclaimed materials.

“When we had the opportunity to recycle this set, it inspired a larger conversation,” says Cole. “We hope that, beyond *Lucia*, we can drive the conversation about how the performing arts as a sector can take action. It’s not just about windmills and recycling and new light bulbs. We’re a large sector, and we have GE right here. We want to drive research and change — how do we change technology on a larger level? It is also very timely in that Cleveland, as a city, has really begun to brand and orient itself to be a leader in sustainability and building a new infrastructure.”

When resources are scarce, arts organizations must be more creative than ever, and this begins with honest conversations, according to Cole. “That conversation is the paradigm shift. We should all be sitting down — general directors, technical directors and designers — to talk about how we can create these wonderful visions on the stage. It’s a significant change in the way we do business.”

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Co-OPERating: The Co-Producing Landscape

by Melanie Feilotter

OPERA America started with the intent to foster co-production. A radical concept in the beginning, the organization facilitated cross-talk among the opera field's players. "For the first time," says Russell Patterson, a founding board member, "I knew what was going on in other cities." Companies of the same scale sought each other out initially; sets weren't so malleable and technology was primitive. These early shared productions sent both scenic elements and a complete cast from one city to the next. The production "bible" was born, conjuring the 19th century grand opera tradition when directors kept a *livret de mise-en-scène* for restaging works. At that time, too, casts traveled with the operas, but most of the physical production (sets, costumes) needed reconstructing each time.

And so it was in 1970, when OPERA America founder Glynn Ross called together the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Francisco Opera. The companies held auditions in Kansas City, a springboard for sharing talent. The bonding among companies, notes Patterson, sent a message to the newly formed National Endowment for the Arts that "opera had a force." Traveling productions eventually broke



Portland Opera's 2006 production of Adams' *Nixon in China*. Photo by Duane Morris.



Broc Johnson as the Executioner and Nadja Michael in the title role of San Francisco Opera's production of Strauss's *Salome*, co-produced with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. Photo by Terrence McCarthy.

“As a co-producer, you’re part of the design process, the look and feel, and that’s not true of renting.”

down because singers (and their managers) opposed the travel; this wasn’t Broadway, after all. The focus shifted to the physical production.

Getting to Know You

By pooling their resources to create scenery and costumes, opera companies stand to benefit from a tested new production they may not have afforded on their own. According to Kevin Smith, general director

of The Minnesota Opera, an eight-company *Turandot* “really helped redefine some companies” in the mid-1990s. Nonetheless, he concedes, the prospect of being second (or third, or fourth) — and sharing ownership — means “the artistic ego does come into play.”

The solution, in part, lies in good relationships — but also a willingness to accept some risk. In the case of new

works, the need for risk acceptance is even greater, taking unknown (and sometimes unwritten) libretti and music as part of the equation. Pre-existing relationships can help secure partnerships. Tim O’Leary, general director at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis (OTSL), was approached by fledgling company American Lyric Theater to take on Peter Ash’s *The Golden Ticket*, and says, “Because I knew Larry (referring to ALT founder and producing director Lawrence Edelson), I read to the end of his e-mail.” That trust can carry collaborators through the rough patches, and allow for conversations and compromises that might not otherwise be so easy. “Everyone’s opinion needs to be respected, says



Edelson, “but everyone can’t have their own way.”

Having partners from inception simplifies the process. Opera Santa Barbara (OSB) commissioned Stephen Schwartz’s *Séance on a Wet Afternoon*, and the piece was workshopped extensively by Seagle Music Colony and American Opera Projects (AOP) before the search for producing partners stalled. As OSB General Director Steven Sharpe says, “In retrospect, I would have sought partners aggressively right up front.” Fort Worth Opera General Director Darren K. Woods points out that it is easier to bring in collaborators before designs are completed. Woods traveled to Santa Barbara to investigate *Séance* for his own

company, but, he says, “when we saw the set (a house) slide down on the wheel, we knew there was no way we could assemble and disassemble it in the time we had.” (*Séance* was subsequently scheduled at Wexford Festival Opera and New York City Opera.)

Co-producers must often absorb costs that go beyond materials and construction. For Jake Heggie’s *Moby-Dick*, a co-commission and co-production led by The Dallas Opera that will travel to Canada and Australia, each company pays to ship the set in and back out. Some added costs are inevitable (re-creating costumes for ill-matched human sizes, for example), but co-producers still save money compared with single-handedly

footing the bill. For new works, commission and copying fees, not to mention added rehearsal time, make co-production almost a financial necessity. *The Golden Ticket*, according to OTSL Artistic Director James Robinson, requires about \$80,000 per investor — but a lone producer would have paid closer to half-a-million dollars.

The Modern Marriage

That’s not a sum many can afford these days. But economic hardship combined with a hunger for innovation make the landscape for co-producing ripe for expansion. “There’s an increasing appetite in opera for people to work together,” says Smith. Experienced collaborators have learned to put aside worries about ownership.

Co-productions — How Can OPERA America Help?

When OPERA America was founded in 1970, one of its core objectives was to encourage and facilitate co-production among members. Over the past 40 years, the organization has maintained this mission and established a growing number of initiatives to support co-production, including:

- **Production Showcase at Annual Opera Conference:** The largest yearly gathering of opera professionals in North America, OPERA America's annual conference convenes the field in order to share best practices and foster communication among constituents in the field. Historically, companies have been able to advertise their co-production opportunities two ways at the conference — by occupying an exhibit booth or giving a dedicated presentation on their co-production plans. *Opera Conference 2010* in Los Angeles will go a step further by introducing Co-Production Speed Dating, a special event dedicated to production matchmaking. Across North America, rental stock of the standard repertory is aging. During the speed dating session, operas carefully selected from the standard repertory will be assigned segments during which producers will discuss potential production collaborations of these works.
- **Production Directory:** In the 1970s, OPERA America began publishing a directory of scenery and costumes available for rental. With the creation of the Information Service, the directory moved online, and was subsequently expanded to include member organizations' production staff contacts and resident theater specs, as well as records of sets, costumes, props, supertitles and musical materials available for rent. This year, the Production Directory will receive another makeover, gaining a more user-friendly interface and new features such as an alphabetical technical/production personnel directory, resident theater comparison function and a message board for posting production-related questions.
- **Future Season Survey:** OPERA America conducts a Future Season Survey each year to learn about companies' upcoming repertoire choices. To help facilitate potential co-productions, OPERA America makes member plans for the next five seasons available to all companies who complete the survey.
- **Co-Production Handbook:** This document, now in its second edition, is available to members on the OPERA America Web site. The current edition was released in 2009 and includes step-by-step considerations companies should make when taking on co-productions, as well as sample co-production contracts for a variety of instances, including international and multi-company agreements.
- **The Opera Fund:** *The Opera Fund* grant program, in conjunction with Opera.ca's *Canadian Opera Creation Fund*, provides incentive for companies who undertake co-productions and co-commissions. Overall, the fund provides technical and financial support to OPERA America Professional Company Members and others as part of a North American effort to enhance the quality, quantity and creativity of new opera and music-theater. Companies who present new works as part of a consortium are eligible to receive up to twice as much funding as sole applicants.

To learn about the above initiatives and more, visit www.operaamerica.org.

Jonathan Pell, artistic director of The Dallas Opera, argues, "Every audience is seeing it for the first time. And if you nailed it the first time, great, but if not, you have a chance to tweak it with each subsequent production. People forget that when Puccini premiered *Madame Butterfly* at La Scala, it was a disaster!"

The process can help foster professional development as well. Robinson directed

Nixon in China in 2004 with Kevin Newbury as his assistant. Newbury subsequently traveled with the production to Portland, Chicago and Cincinnati, among other cities, fulfilling Robinson's vision while learning to navigate the quirks of each new venue. "I had a different cast in some cities, and they would come with ideas of their own. Adjustments (to the set) almost always need to be made. The key is communicating everything ahead of time," recalls Newbury.

Entrepreneurial attitudes are leading to unlikely partnerships. Robinson relays that OTSL's 2009 co-production of *Salome* with San Francisco was unique because of their radically different stages: Saint Louis has a thrust stage with a wide upstage proscenium, and for San Francisco, the set was put on a rake. "The designer was very clever," says Robinson, "making sure we weren't just retrofitting something for another space, but ensuring it looked like it was created for that space."

Technical demands present interesting challenges for design teams. Set designer Allen Moyer has mixed feelings about co-producing, but embraces the idea that it's the most practical way to advance opera today. "If there are five companies involved," he says, "it means you get more money for your budget, which is good." And, he adds, "As a co-producer, you're part of the design process, the look and feel, and that's not true of renting." The downside, of course, is the designer must account for the production schedules and stages of the co-producing companies: that's added work without the added pay. As OTSL Technical Director Steve Ryan says, "It does extend our season, and there are days when you don't want to check with three other people on how to build something." He teaches his staff to be flexible in terms of budget and other contracted requirements. Ryan says OTSL talks about changing its business model to accommodate co-production

demands, possibly by opening a year-round shop (for costume-making, for example).

Further to changing business models, Moyer and Newbury are breaking ground by initiating co-productions themselves, without the safety net of a company behind them. The two have a design project they intend to shop around, and Newbury says of his own work: "I'm trying to promote everything as a co-production now." When he secures a commitment, Newbury visits other theaters to assess the technical and aesthetic requirements. He's planning a production of *Eugene Onegin* that may be scaled up or down. "We have an intimate take on the piece, even though there are a couple of big party scenes. We're trimming down the ballet music" to scale

back the bigger, more costly scenes. But at a larger house, the scale may be appropriately modified. "We're finding a way to compromise that keeps the integrity of the work," he says.

The field craves these new ideas. Smith maintains we will see a rise in co-production activity as opera producers seek to supplement what he calls "a tired old inventory" of sets and costumes for the standard repertoire. Plumbing the opera canon is just part of the picture nowadays; consortiums will be crucial to the advancement of new works, as most everyone interviewed for this article agreed. Edelson founded ALT in 2005 with the partial intent to support new works that have the potential for staging in a

"No one can afford to work in isolation anymore."

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“Everyone’s opinion needs to be respected, but everyone can’t have their own way.”

multitude of venues. He obtained the rights to *The Golden Ticket*, and put money and workshopping time into it before even shopping for a producer. The risk paid off, proven by the collaboration with OTSL and another overseas producer.

It Takes a Village

Co-producing is also being redefined as companies expand collaboration beyond the production itself. The involvement of development, marketing and education departments makes the process more complex, but arguably offers a bigger reward in terms of cost savings, visibility and audience penetration.

The education departments of Forth Worth, Saint Louis and Central City Opera have found partners in local schools, conservatories and orchestras. While not co-productions in the traditional sense, these collaborations allow the companies to extend their mainstage seasons, take advantage of smaller venues and reach deeper into their communities to win new audiences.

Opera Company of Philadelphia (OCP), which includes co-production in its strategic plan, established a close relationship with Curtis Institute of Music that extends to workshops, performance venues, marketing and fundraising. OCP secured funding for Curtis productions of *Wozzeck* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, helped with marketing and ticket sales, and billed the performances as part of their own season. “Because Curtis is educational,” explains Annie Burrige, head of development at OCP, “they didn’t fit the funding stream, but with this collaboration they became eligible. It extends our season with little cost to us. This is a cost-effective, smart way to advance opera. Fundraisers need to hurry up and figure out how to do this, if they

haven’t already.” The two institutions are wholly intertwined, further diluting the risk. Curtis assumes the production costs, but OCP handles ticket sales. Both parties thus have a financial stake, but without too much artistic intermingling after the repertoire is decided. Curtis students get to work on a professional production; OCP gets to bill an added, innovative work.

Opera boasts many creative minds in the artistic realm; and in some cases that creativity is clearly carrying over into the business side. But the possibilities haven’t yet been fully exploited. As Michigan Opera Theatre General Director David DiChiera notes, “There may be collaborations between opera companies and other institutions that we’re not yet really thinking about.”

Keeping the Flame Alive

The world of co-productions may be growing in creative ways, but is it the model for the future? “It’s a strategy that’s been under-utilized,” says Smith. “If it were embraced whole-heartedly, it could really work, but that’s where the artistic ego comes into play — we need to get over that hump.” O’Leary agrees: “Little moments we would forgive in our own institutions become great affronts when they’re from outside.”

Familiarity with the process has kept many of the same players engaged in co-productions for decades. And a few game-changers are experimenting with new models in the name of supporting new works. But there is ample room — and need — for the circle to widen. “No one can afford to work in isolation anymore,” says Diane Wondisford, producing director of Music-Theatre Group. The rich ecosystem of musical resources still waits to be tapped. 📧

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“Opera should sweep us not out of the human situation, but into it.”

A conversation between OPERA America President and CEO Marc A. Scorca and designer John Conklin



John Conklin's idea board for Opera Australia's 2000 production of Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles*. Photo by Katherine L. Ehle/OPERA America.

MARC SCORCA: I want to begin by considering the place of design in opera. We talk about opera as an amalgam of art forms. Is design an equal partner?

JOHN CONKLIN: A few minutes ago, you asked whether I had ever seen Maria Callas. I said not on stage, but in a concert performance of *Il pirata* at Carnegie Hall. And this makes me think about what you meant by “the place of design.” That performance was not designed in any conventional sense, but it was a visual experience with a high level of visceral impact and intellectual content. She was dressed in black with a long stole (red, as I remember ... if it wasn't, it should have been). The picture was a complex one: the interaction of her figure (basically stationary but full of gestural movement), the dramatic manipulation of that stole and the view of the orchestra, the other singers, the audience and the auditorium setting.

To expand further, one of the most complete visual and theatrical performances of an opera I have ever experienced was another concert performance — the Chicago Symphony under Solti performing act three of *Götterdämmerung*, also at Carnegie Hall. The huge orchestra filled the stage; a platform at the back held the men's chorus and a platform at the side held the three Rhinemaidens. The soloists in full formal dress were in front, and when they “died” they quietly sat down, shut their musical scores and stared out at us. No lurching, or grabbing of the heart, or crumbling to the ground — just that banal yet devastating final gesture for a musician. Everyone was in black except the Brünnhilde (Helge Dernesh) who was in brilliant emerald green. In the final moments, after the Immolation scene, everyone was seated except Solti (and the double bass players); the singers silent; the orchestra working, visually struggling (in a good way) with the musical complexities. Then it faded away, stopped,

and there was silence in the vast space full of silenced people, all set in the golden and cream ambiance of this 19th-century concert hall ... a vision of the end (and the potential of a new beginning) of the world that I will never forget. I have done two *Ring* cycles and seen many more and this will always be for me the most evocative and dramaturgically rich. There was no design as such ... and yet it was a totally “designed” event.

SCORCA: A lot of opera companies feel they are competing in a crowded entertainment marketplace. The audience has gone to see Cirque du Soleil, to movies with stunning visual effects, and some feel that opera has to compete on that playing field. Do you agree?

CONKLIN: Perhaps they don't need to see it as competition. There is so much out there that is visual cacophony — noise that covers up, subverts the simple unadorned power of the human performance. There are spectacles that are attractive and superficially compelling and very successful ... and somewhere in their empty centers essentially boring because they submerge the energy and charisma of the individual.

I think the size of the theaters is an enormous problem. If you get too far away from the performers and you cannot see the expression in their eyes, in a certain sense you might as well just give up. One of the reasons the high-definition broadcasts have been so successful is because you can see people. You can see their eyes. The spectacle is, in some ways, cut out. I think people are anxious to see this. If you can show it to them, they will flock to it.

It is not as though big movements cannot be expressive. One of my favorite performers was Christa Ludwig. She had a big voice, yes, but she was an actress who could infuse grand gesture with all this feeling. Callas did it, too. Instead of being empty, their big gestures were full of extraordinary feeling and passion.

People are always saying, “opera is larger than life.” What could that actually mean? The Grand Canyon is larger than life. The moon is larger than life. But opera IS life. The scale of opera is the scale of the human body and, most particularly, the human face. *Così fan tutte* and *Götterdämmerung* are exactly the same scale. Wagner didn't know what the gods sounded like, but he knew the pain of a great man caught between duty and love for his daughter. That's the same pain that Fiordiligi feels when she can't decide what to do because she's fallen in love with another man.

SCORCA: How does the audience figure into your process? Do you think, “They'll love this,” or “This will surprise them?”

CONKLIN: What is the audience? What does it mean to concern yourself with the audience? There are as many different nuanced

thoughts as there are people in any audience. You just have to commit yourself completely to what you're doing, to what the director and other designers are doing, to what the piece suggests. You have to keep asking, “Does this feel right?” not, “Are they going to understand it?” There is no way to judge that.

You work incredibly hard, very specifically, you do it, and you hope. And if you've all poured enough passion into it, certainly aided by the passion of Mozart and Verdi and Puccini, then you have to say to the audience, “It's yours. You do with it what you want to do with it. I'm not going to tell you what I meant in program notes or interviews.” People can have completely opposite reactions to what we meant, and more often than not they have a much more interesting idea than what we thought.

There is no such thing as an ideal *Flute*, or an ideal *Ring*. I could design a different *Flute* every year for the rest of my life. One of the things you need to accept when you come to the *Ring* or the *Magic Flute* is that you're not going to be able to do it all. I'm not going to be able to embrace the whole piece. They're too big, which is why they're great. I'm just going to focus on what I feel now about these pieces. They have infinite worlds in them, and each can be explored.

That's why productions can take a visually banal contemporary world and run it side by side with extravagant imagination and vision. Ten years ago I would have said that any tenor aria is more effectively sung by somebody in a suit. (I don't quite believe that as much as I used to...) Some people think that contemporary banality trivializes opera, but I think it's the other way around. The opera ennobles the trivial. A guy in a suit singing “Questo e quella” is not bringing the aria down, he is bringing the suit up to Verdi's level. It's so funny that people think anything that has to do with our modern life — these chairs, fluorescent lights — these things are trivial. It seems a curiously negative psychological attitude to have toward ourselves. Opera should sweep us not out of the human situation, but into it.

There are so many different routes. That's why I've always been interested in working in opera and theater and dance — big houses, small houses, big budgets and less big. A large part of design is just fun... and even might I go so far as to say exaltation? I dance with Carmen, I laugh with Falstaff, I sit down across the table from Puccini and discuss *Bohème*. He's there talking to me... what a privilege is that? Sometimes I might disagree with him, or he with me, but it is an extraordinary interchange. And then I and my collaborators have the joyful job of welcoming an audience in all their variety and individuality to join our experience. 🍷

Marc A. Scorca hosted an evening with John Conklin as part of OPERA America's Making Connections. Making Connections is sponsored, in part, by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Podcasts are available on www.operaamerica.org.

Projecting the Future

By Kelley Rourke

“This is part of the future,” says projections designer Wendall Harrington of the use of digital imagery in live opera. “It is a natural evolution. It is not about bringing TV or movies to the theater. It is a correct response to the fact that we live in a cinematic age.”

More and more opera companies have unveiled productions that include an element of projection design. Is this new approach to visuals a way to bring in today’s tech-savvy young audiences? A solution for cash-strapped opera companies seeking to slash scenery budgets? Potentially, but not always. And experienced projection designers caution that the first consideration must be artistic.

“You always have to ask: is it the right tool for what we’re trying to achieve?” says Peter Nigrini. “I thought *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* at New York City Opera was a really good example of a successful use of projections. There was an actual reason based in the piece, which was cinematic in scope, with changes of time and space. One of the locations is ‘the saddest city in the world’ — a completely fanciful place, more of an idea really, something you couldn’t achieve with scenery alone. The opera was not written in the conventional 19th-century opera tradition. In *Frau Margot*, too, we had to be able to move from location to location very quickly. But at the same time, we were looking for a more impressionistic idea of the stage space. It was not so much creating location as style and mood.”

“Projections have to feel right for the subject,” agrees Harrington. “Projections, by their very nature, are abstract. They are dancing light molecules in space. They don’t even have the density of a slide. A projection does not make a good door. There is a dance between what



New York City Opera's production of Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, with projection design by Peter Nigrini. Photos by Carol Rosegg.



New York City Opera's production of Weisgal's *Esther* with projection design by Jerome Sirlin. Photos courtesy of Jerome Sirlin.

you see and what you know, and that dance is audience participation. *Rusalka* works well because it is a fantasy world. We all know we aren't underwater, so we're all in on it together, and that's a lot more fun."

She continues: "I would be loath to say there are pieces where you could never use projections, although if you wanted to do *Bohème*, I would wonder. There are very specific places where Puccini's music feels like a documentary. I think projections work best in things like the *Ring* cycle, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* — when you are asking an audience to take a trip, literally and figuratively."

While there is a definite learning curve, projections are transforming the way we think about making theater in the 21st century. "Projections, like stage lighting, add a richness and depth to a production that physical scenery alone doesn't provide," says designer Jerome Sirlin. "Whether designing projected sets, adding image texture to hard scenery or applying special effects, the scenic projection process works for me in countless ways. Digital scenics are changing the face of live performance and will do the same in opera design through the next decades and beyond."

Opera producers are forever balancing artistic concerns with budgetary ones, and projected shows vary greatly in cost. "I've designed projects that have cost a half million to build, and ones that have cost \$20,000 or less," says Sirlin. His production of *Esther*, recently revived by New York City Opera, consists mostly of a series of inexpensive screens. "It must have been the smallest box in their warehouse. They took the rolled up screens out of the container, hung them on system pipes, and flew them out... that was it."

Like any tool employed in the theater, projections require expert handling if they are to yield the desired budgetary and artistic outcome, but at this point, many opera company leaders lack the experience needed to accurately project costs and effect. Where to begin?

"The thing is to talk to a professional," says Harrington. "I try to make myself available to answer any kind of question. If you're putting a show together and have no clue, take the time to ask a bunch of stupid questions. I'm happy to answer them, to tell you if I think something is possible."

All designers caution that, while projections can help reduce the amount of scenery needed for a given opera, they are not a substitute. "There has been some interest in projections as a replacement for scenery, and I can't say that often that works out well," says Nigrini. "More often than not, there is still a fair amount of scenery on the stage. Ultimately you have a bunch of singers who need to stand somewhere. They need to be able to sit down at a table. One way or another you need some actual physical objects. You need a physical world that is material in a way that projections can never be. For *Frau*, there was furniture. For *Haroun*, a lot of the physical world came from the costumes by Candice Donnelly, which were fantastic."

"Projections are not cheap scenery," says Harrington. "They are more like thoughts and feelings. You can have a million thoughts in five seconds, with eight emotions layered on top. This is what they can bring. But you have to see live actors in relationship to something that is three-dimensional. If not, you don't know how to understand that person."



Some designers design both scenery and projections. Sirlin, who trained as an architect, says, “I design physical sets combined with screen configurations to give dimension and depth to the scenery. When projections are added, the effect is both ethereal and material.”

Harrington, on the other hand, prefers to concentrate on projection design. “I’m not a three-dimensional person. I like to work with a set designer. The more people in the room collaborating, the more you get. I want to be better. The push and pull is a very valuable thing.”

“I occasionally design sets, but nine times out of 10, I’m just doing projection,” says Nigrini. “Obviously collaboration with the set designer becomes very intimate. I am very much involved from the technical and creative standpoint about how what I’m doing interacts with the scenic elements. Often a director or designer will have gotten a little farther than would be ideal before I’m asked to join. Sometimes the set designer provides a canvas and says go to town. In another scheme, they might come in with ideas and I become an editor. That takes a delicate hand. The sooner the conversation begins, the better. If they call me after they’ve begun designing, that’s great, but it would be better if, the day they say, ‘Maybe we should think about projections,’ they should give me a call, even if we have a conversation that goes nowhere.”



Once the team is assembled for an opera, how does the company’s technical staff set the stage for success? The first task is securing the equipment, and most experts recommend renting it, at least the first time. “Many companies think they want to own stuff so they can rent it out. But the economics don’t usually work” for projection equipment, says Nigrini.

The Minnesota Opera is one company that has found projection equipment to be an important investment. “Part of the reason is that we do some unusual rep that no one else does,” says Production Director Kevin Ramach, who explains that co-production and rental opportunities for certain repertoire is very limited. “Having projections helped us to do those pieces in a less expensive way.”



“They’re not something we use for all our productions, not even necessarily half of them,” continues Ramach. “What happens is, we’re in the process, and sometimes there is something the designer and director want to create. We look at what they’ve proposed and it’s going to be way too expensive. We may go back to them and say, ‘We don’t think we can afford to build the scenic element,

The Minnesota Opera’s production of Dvorak’s *Rusalka* with projection design by Wendall Harrington. Photos by Michal Daniel.

but we think we might be able to do something with this technology.' I don't think we would use projections as much if we had to rent the equipment. We feel like it has been a good investment for us because we've used it a lot. And I don't think the obsolescence rate is as sharp as it once was."

However the company decides to secure the equipment, it is likely that there will also be a need for additional staff. "Adding projection is sort of like adding a department," says Nigrini. "If there is scenery, you need a technical director, you need carpenters, you need stagehands. Same with lighting. For projection, you need people who are responsible for the equipment, and finding those people can be a challenge. At Fort Worth, we developed a relationship with a local video company that mostly does trade shows."

While these companies typically work with deep-pocketed corporate clients, Harrington has observed that opera companies can often strike up partnerships if they plan in advance: "The first thing is to find your local supplier, invite them in, talk to them. They may be just so thrilled to not be doing the next widget show." Nigrini agrees: "They mainly do car shows and business meetings, and when they get a call from the opera usually they can't believe their luck and are willing to be helpful. They don't have theatrical knowledge, but you can put their technicians together with a good production electrician."

"Working with projections is not all that difficult after the first or second time a company does it," says Harrington. "A place like Minnesota, where they've been doing it for awhile, they know exactly how it works. Projection design has all the front-end work of set design, things that have to be designed and built before you come in. People

think you just suck things off the Internet, but I need four weeks to build a show. Then, you also have the moment-to-moment work of a lighting designer when you get into the theater. What's great is that I can have a new idea about something I've built — it's not like when the 40-foot wall shows up and the scenic designer thinks maybe it should have been blue instead. Still, there is a great deal of planning and prep. I am the designer and the shop. You may not see the sawdust but there's a fair amount of pixels on the shop floor."

"There are special challenges with opera based on how short the tech period is," says Nigrini. "I understand we can't always get the singers, but even getting additional time in the theater without singers is helpful. Companies need to be prepared to either increase the amount of labor or find additional time. The other thing I've found very useful, particularly with new operas, is to have some sort of recording before we begin. So often we're trying to bridge a theatrical language and a cinematic one. When you make a film, you bring in a composer and they write music to the film. What we're struggling to do is the opposite, but what we're striving for is the same completely integrated relationship. Audiences expect that fine-grained relationship between score and image. It's essential for me to be at the sitz and I find it very helpful if I can have a recording of the sitz."

Sirlin says one added advantage of working with projected scenery is that it is easily and quickly edited in the theater. And because the digital imagery is shared by so many platforms, "I pre-plan the entire show using animated storyboards and virtual 3-D models, helping producers and directors visualize the production throughout the design process, and giving them a virtual experience of the show. When I designed *Macbeth* for Christopher Mattaliano at Portland Opera, I created a

Encompass New Opera Theatre's production of Henze's *The End of a World*, with projection design by Kirby Malone and Gail Scott White.



virtual model of the set with projections which they presented at the OPERA America conference to attract co-producers.”

Once in the theater, collaboration between the lighting designer and the projection designer is key — and it’s not just a matter of keeping the lights off the projection surface. “We’re all in the same business, making light,” says Harrington. “Colors have to be tuned. Video projectors have a special color temperature, and I have to work with the lighting designer to make it look like one world. When the lighting designer puts some light on top of the projections, it can help. When you are so busy trying to respect boundaries, it doesn’t make for the best stage picture. It’s better if you don’t see the edges.”

“It takes an openness on my part and the lighting designer’s part to respond to what the other is doing,” says Nigrini. “I work very hard to make sure I am sitting in the right place in the theater. I always request to sit next to the lighting designer. I find the ability to communicate with the lighting designer, even nonverbally, just sitting next to him or her, watching what they are doing, allows us to communicate much better. We’re two people trying to paint one canvas. I love working with Robert Wierzel. Other design professionals have said there are moments where they couldn’t see the boundary between my work and his. That’s one of the highest compliments I’ve ever received.”

How does changing technology affect revivals? The production of *Esther* recently revived at New York City Opera was 16 years old. “As technology changes it’s an exciting process to retool older productions and bring them up to date,” says Sirlin. “For *Esther*, I digitized the original 6”x 6” Pani slides for video projection. Working with the director I was then able to massage much of the original imagery for the 2009 production.”

Nigrini points out that the economics of rentals change for a show that involves projections. Since, in most cases, equipment is rented locally, it does not travel with the sets, props and costumes. While a show that relies on projections may have less scenery, resulting in a lower rental and shipping costs, the company will need to find its own local projection vendor and figure in the costs of both equipment and personnel. There can be other complications when moving to a second theater: “Some opera houses stages aren’t deep enough to rear-project, which means you would have to put the projectors in the auditorium, and no one likes that because they make noise.”



Fort Worth Opera's world premiere production of Pasatieri's *Frau Margot*, with projection design by Peter Nigrini. Photos courtesy of Fort Worth Opera.



Syracuse Opera's production of Adamo's *Little Women*, with projection design by Barry Steele. Photos by Doug Wonders.

"I wouldn't be surprised in 20 years if people look at media design the way we now look at sound design in regional theater," says Kirby Malone, artistic director of Cyurbia Productions. "I'm old enough to remember the 1980s, when there would be a discussion at production meetings about whether there would be sound design. It's now taken as a given that you will use sound to create an atmosphere for a show. Ten to 20 years from now, I think the same will be true of visual media. In the meantime, how do artists who can make that happen find their way into the opera world? The mistake some people make is when they hire artists who make beautiful visuals but don't have a lot of experience wedding that with a live show. It takes people with vision and an open mind to figure out how to work this added layer into the process so everything can go smoothly."

Syracuse Opera employed projections for the first time with a production of *Little Women* in 2009. This season, the company used the same technology to enhance a concert version of *The Flying Dutchman*. "*Dutchman* is something we've always wanted to do, but the costs of staging it kept getting in the way. We wanted to make it more than a concert, though," says General and Artistic Director Catherine Wolff. Because of the positive experience with *Little Women*, Wolff re-engaged scenic designer Peter Harrison and lighting/projection designer

Barry Steele (who worked on *Little Women*) to create an environment for the concert, working in collaboration with students from Syracuse University's Industrial and Interactive Design department. Fourteen students met with opera personnel and were given a recording, score and libretto. Each one will be responsible for a segment of the opera. "Barry will ultimately look at their work with a professional eye and make sure the transitions work, and will be providing lighting to complement the films."

"I look forward to seeing opera companies as well as symphony orchestras embrace the scenic concert," says Sirlin. "Creating a scenic libretto to an arias concert, an oratorio or symphony provides a fresh musical experience and may well attract new audiences to the concert hall."

"All of us understand that we're inventing the field. We're happy to help companies learn how to work with us," says Nigrini. "How we take a 21st-century sensibility and layer it on a 19th-century work of art is where it gets challenging — and also interesting. Ultimately it's like everything else. We have to be honest. We don't need a lot of scenery, but we do need honesty. As long as we are working to serve the goals of the composer I think the more interpretations the better." 🍷

attention opera company leaders



Los Angeles Opera's *Das Rheingold*. Photo by Monika Rittershaus.



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National Opera Trustee Recognition Awards



Performance at the 2010 National Opera Trustee Recognition Awards. Photo by Jon Simon.

On February 20, 2010 OPERA America honored recipients of the **2010 National Opera Trustee Recognition Award** at a special event held in New York City. In its third year, this award honors trustees of U.S. opera companies for exemplary leadership, generosity and audience-building efforts on behalf of their respective opera companies. The National Opera Trustee Recognition Program is generously sponsored by Bank of America.

Each year, OPERA America member companies are invited to nominate one of their trustees for this award. Honorees from each of the four OPERA America budget levels are chosen by an adjudication committee. This year's committee was comprised of Fred Good, board member of Cincinnati Opera; Ruth Orth, board chair of Pensacola Opera; Fillmore Wood, former board member of Opera Pacific; and Committee Chair Frayda B. Lindemann, vice president of the board of the Metropolitan Opera. Mr. Good and Dr. Orth are members of OPERA America's National Trustee Forum, Mr. Wood serves on the organization's Investment Advisory Committee and Dr. Lindemann is vice president of the board of OPERA America.

The 2010 National Opera Trustee Recognition honorees are **Marc I. Stern of Los Angeles Opera, Jeffrey A. Evershed of Portland Opera, Eve and Fred Simon of Opera Omaha and Benjamin Keaton of Long Leaf Opera (NC).**

Turkish-American composer Kamran Ince was on hand to debut new music from his developing opera *Judgment of Midas* with authentic Turkish instruments providing the gateway into the setting of this ancient Greek myth set in the composer's ancestral homeland. Metropolitan Opera Maestro J. David Jackson, accompanied by fellow music director Jonathan Khuner, conducted Metropolitan Opera baritone Richard Bernstein as Apollo in his musical duel with New York City Opera tenor Matt Morgan's forest god Pan. Nicole Mitchell, Sarah Nelson Craft, Sarah Moulton and Heather Meyer also sang the evening to a close.



OPERA America Chairman Anthony Freud and the National Opera Trustee Recognition Program Chairman Frayda Lindemann present Jeffrey A. Evershed, one of four honorees, with his award. Photo by Jon Simon.

Marc I. Stern, Los Angeles Opera

Marc I. Stern has been one of Los Angeles's preeminent cultural leaders for over a decade. He has served as Los Angeles Opera's chairman and CEO since 2002, leading the company to become one of the most important in the U.S., and providing volunteer leadership for artistic and community service initiatives that have solidified Los Angeles Opera's unique artistic identity. Through their personal giving and through the Marc and Eva Stern Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Stern are among Los Angeles Opera's most generous benefactors, providing extraordinary support for new productions, special events and artistic programming. He also serves on the boards of the Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the California Institute of Technology and Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. Mr. Stern is vice chairman and CEO of The TCW Group Inc., an asset management firm with over \$100 billion in assets under management. Mr. Stern has been appointed as a "Commandeur de l'Ordre National du Mérite" by the President of France. He is a member of the management committee of Société Générale Group and chairman of Société Générale's Global Investment Management and Services (GIMS) North America unit. TCW was acquired by Société Générale in 2001. He currently serves as a director of Qualcomm, Inc. (NASDAQ), a director of Rockefeller & Co., Inc., and is a member of the advisory board and an owner of the Milwaukee Brewers.

Jeffrey A. Evershed, Portland Opera

Prior to joining Portland Opera's board of directors in 1990 as a corporate representative from one of the organization's major sponsors, Jeffrey A. Evershed had never attended a single opera. That first exposure to opera has fueled a passionate commitment to both Portland Opera and to the art form. In his 19 years on the board of Portland Opera, he has amassed an astounding resume of inspired leadership, advocacy and governance. During Mr. Evershed's tenures as president of the board and as chairman, he led Portland Opera through the *Fresh Aria Campaign*, a five-year effort to enhance the sustainability

of Portland Opera and the artistic quality of productions. This successful \$16.7 million campaign was the largest fundraising effort conducted by a Portland cultural institution to date and set a new bar for arts support in the community. It also placed the company on a strong and stable financial footing that has resulted in Portland Opera completing 11 of the past 12 years in the black. Mr. Evershed also played a pivotal role in helping Portland Opera acquire its new home in 2003. The purchase and renovation of The Hampton Opera Center marked the first time in its 40-year history that Portland Opera was able to consolidate its administrative, artistic and rehearsal facilities and a studio theater under one roof. Together with General Director Christopher Mattaliano, he has helped expand the season and dramatically grow Portland Opera's audience, establish the new Portland Opera Studio Artist program and launch a new chamber opera series. Mr. Evershed also led the company in the launch of the *New Era Initiative*, a five-year strategic effort focused on creating sustainability in virtually every area of operations — from earned revenue and fundraising to program planning and endowment.

Eve and Fred Simon, Opera Omaha


For five generations, the Simon family and their family-owned business, Omaha Steaks, have been critical supporters of every major arts organization in Omaha, as well as others nationally. For nearly 40 years, Eve and Fred Simon's generous personal giving and participation in all aspects of Opera Omaha's activities, coupled with their company's ongoing sponsorship, have made them wonderful advocates for fundraising and have ensured the health of Opera Omaha. Their individual gifts have allowed Opera Omaha to provide productions of the highest artistic quality possible for the people of this community, while at the same time ensuring the company's longevity. Most recently, Mr. Simon served as the lead fundraiser for Opera Omaha's collaboration with the Institute for Holocaust Education's production of *Brundibár*, which was attended by 9,000 area schoolchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Simon's monumental fundraising efforts, including reaching out to other patrons and helping to build new audience, have resulted in continued fiscal health for the arts in Omaha. For more than 20 years, Mr. Simon's company has annually sponsored productions, community outreach events, the opera chorus, artists, personnel and season program books. In 2008, in celebration of Opera Omaha's 50th anniversary, Mr. Simon was also the co-sponsor of the production of a retrospective, full-color book entitled *Opera in Omaha: The First Fifty Years*, which chronicles the rich history of the organization through the eyes of those who have witnessed the organization's success. In addition to providing long-term fiscal support to Opera Omaha, thus ensuring that this beautiful art form is available for future generations, Mr. and Mrs. Simon are also important supporters of The Santa Fe Opera and Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, as well as other key arts organizations in their community: the Omaha Symphony, Film Streams, the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha Performing Arts Society and the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

Benjamin Keaton, Long Leaf Opera

(Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill, NC)

Twelve years ago, conductor and composer Benjamin Keaton co-founded Long Leaf Opera with Randolph Umberger as an alternative company with two missions: to present exclusively operas written originally in English and to develop a multicultural company of artists at all levels. Concerned with the lack of opportunities for young American composers, Mr. Keaton set out to recruit the finest regional and national composing talents available and to follow a colorblind casting policy on stage, in the pit and in the board room. Since then, Mr. Keaton has overseen the production of 33 operas, including seven world premieres. In 2007, Keaton established an international competition for new operatic works, and to date over 100 compositions have been received from countries including Germany, Australia and the U.K. Under his baton, the company's orchestra and vocalists have evolved from local performers to a professional company of artists with established careers at major opera houses both in Europe and the U.S. In his 12 years on the board of directors, Mr. Keaton has served as vice-chair and treasurer, and has tirelessly encouraged others to donate time and money to Long Leaf Opera. A native of Belhaven, NC, Keaton holds a Master's degree from East Carolina University, where he was a founding member of the Zeta Psi Chapter of Phi Mu Alpha and where he has recently endowed scholarships for voice majors. Keaton taught 20th-century music and theory for 18 years at NCCU, and has served as maestro for musical organizations throughout the southeast and west. He has directed in England and serves as opera advisor to Chez Nous Productions in Paris. He is a composer of vocal and instrumental music and was recently awarded the Durham Jaycees Outstanding Citizen Award and the ECU School of Music's Distinguished Alumni Award for 2009. In addition to Long Leaf Opera, Mr. Keaton supports The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Central City Opera, The Santa Fe Opera and Opera Fort Collins.

OPERA America's commitment to recognizing excellence in governance is shared by its sister organization Opera.ca, the Canadian national association for opera. In its second year, this distinction, sponsored by BMO Financial Group, honors one opera board director annually for exemplary leadership and support on behalf of their opera company and the community they serve. The recipient of the **2009-2010 Opera.ca National Opera Directors Recognition Program** is **Alberta Cefis**, chair of the board of directors for **Opera Atelier**. Under Ms. Cefis's leadership, Opera Atelier has moved to a two-production subscription season in Toronto's Elgin Theatre, selling up to 18,000 tickets a year, while continuing to tour every other year. The company's budget is now approaching \$2.5 million and has realized a 30 percent increase in subscriptions and a 27 percent increase in fundraising revenues in the last fiscal year. 🍷



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Behind the Numbers

Reported declines in arts attendance have received a great deal of press in recent months. As Marc A. Scorca noted in his message to the field (page five), it is important to consider survey data and methodology, and to review multiple sources of data to determine the health of opera.

National Endowment for the Arts 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

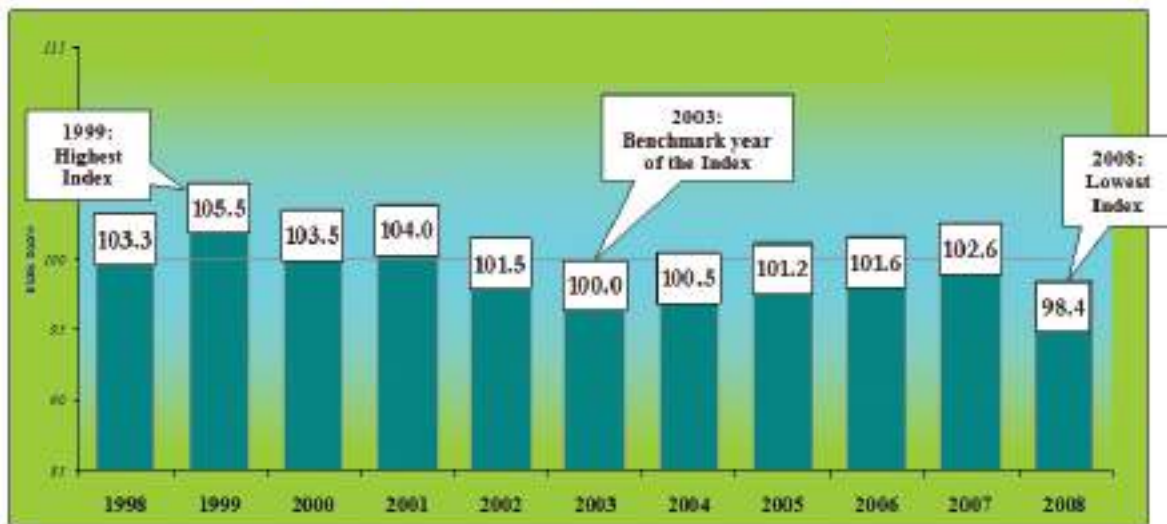
The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) is the nation's largest periodic study of adult participation in arts events and activities, conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau. Five times since 1982, the survey, administered via telephone, has asked U.S. adults 18 and older about their patterns of arts participation over a 12-month period. The survey is subject to significant participant bias, both in terms of how strong respondent recollections are, and how different respondents define opera. The 2008 SPPA reported dwindling audiences for many art forms, including opera.

- Percentage of adults attending opera in 1982
3.0% - 4.5 million
- Percentage of adults attending opera in 1992
3.3% - 6.1 million
(36% increase since 1982)
- Percentage of adults attending opera in 2002
3.2% - 6.6 million
(8% increase since 1992)
- Percentage of adults attending opera in 2008
2.1% - 4.8 million
(27% decrease since 2002)
(7% increase since 1982)

Americans for the Arts National Arts Index

The National Arts Index (NAI) is a highly-distilled annual measure of the health and vitality of arts in the U.S. It uses 76 equally weighted, national-level indicators of arts activity. The 2008 NAI report covers an 11-year period, from 1998 to 2008. Data gleaned from the national service organizations were used to compile the Index. The most recent report confirms the past decade's dip in live opera attendance that was reported in the 2008 SPPA, although the reported decline in the NAI is much smaller than reported in the SPPA. The report also notes an increase in main season attendance since 2002 (contrary to what was reported in the 2008 SPPA). Indeed, opera attendance has "beaten" the overall arts index in every year of the survey.

National Arts Index: 1998 - 2008 (2003 = 100)



OPERA America: Annual Field Report

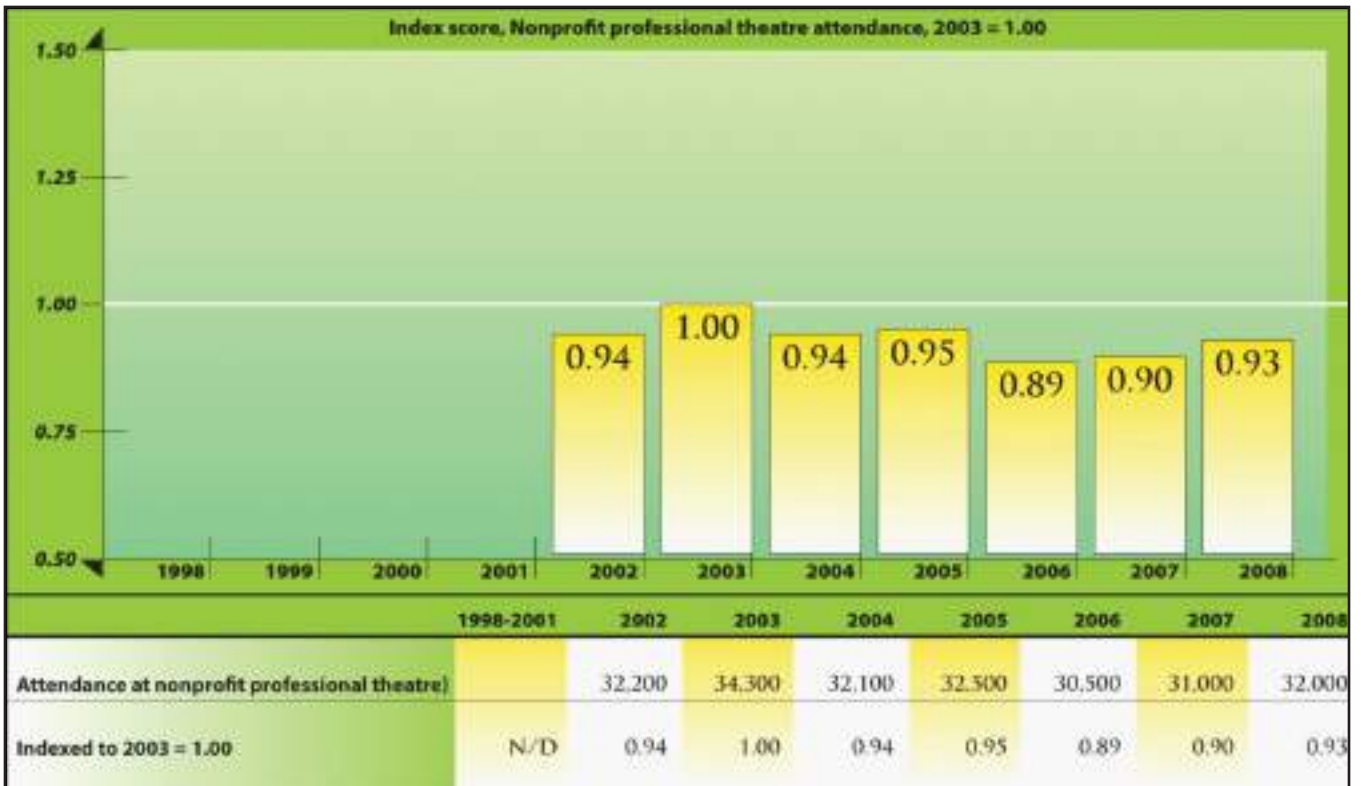


NOTE: 2003 is the base year of the NAI because it is the first year for which all 76 arts activity indicators were available, and is recent enough to relate the statistical findings of the index to current events. OPERA America's *Annual Field Report* is one of the indicators used in compiling the index. The 2003 base year for each arts activity is set to 1.00 or a score of 100.

League of American Orchestras: Orchestral Survey Report



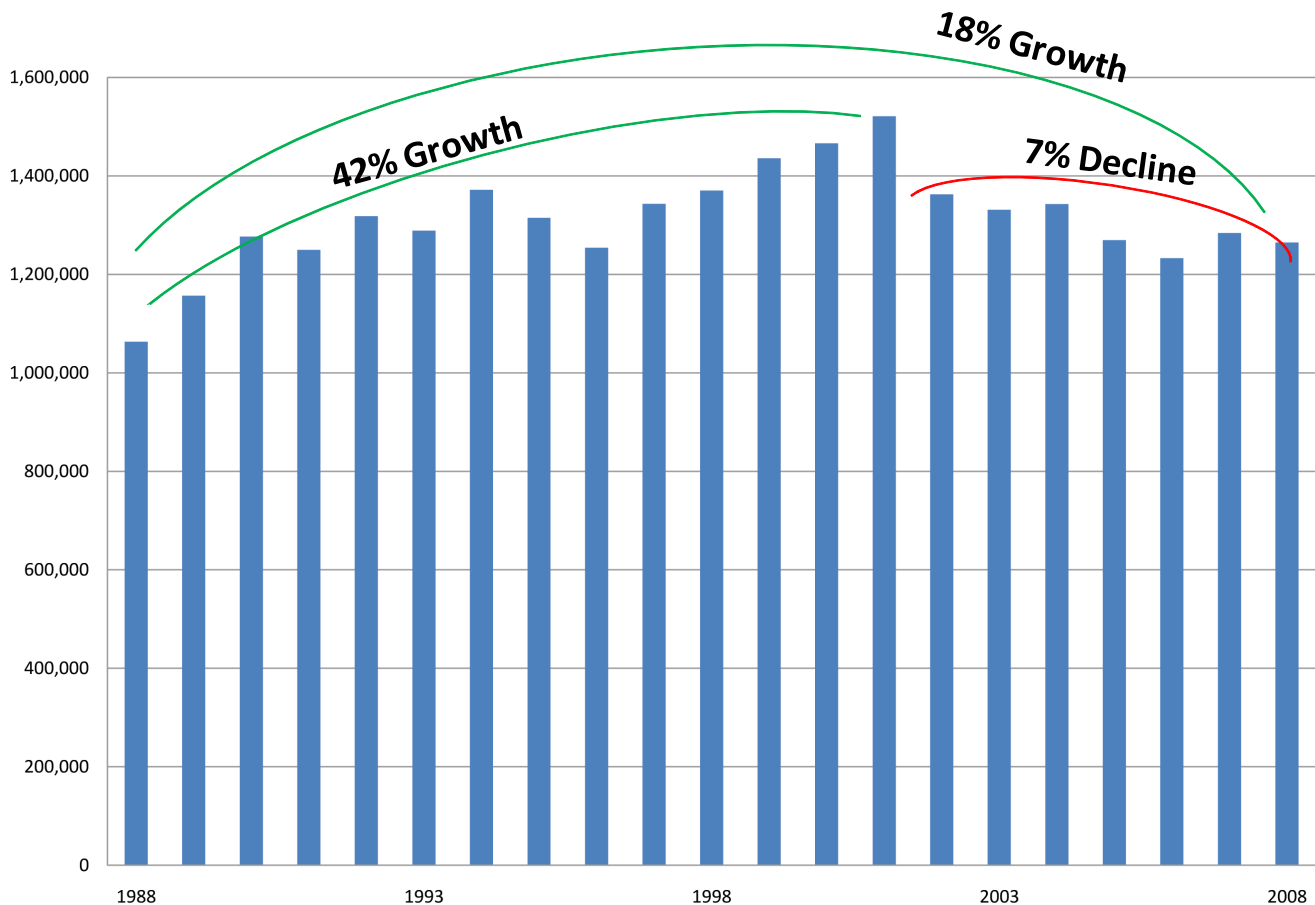
Theatre Communications Group: Theatre Facts



OPERA America Professional Opera Survey

OPERA America collects annual data on professional opera company attendance and financial operations through its Professional Opera Survey. OPERA America is able to speak authoritatively on behalf of the field because more than 90 percent of eligible professional opera companies are members of the association. Twenty-five U.S. companies (roughly a quarter of the current professional company membership) have reported consistent data for the past two decades, comprising the 20-year U.S. Constant Sample Group (CSG). OPERA America's data confirm that attendance at main season productions has declined somewhat since the start of the decade, but not nearly as steeply as reported in the SPPA. Further, attendance over the 20 years from 1988 to 2008 is up 18 percent, even after adjusting for recent declines.

**Main Season Paid Attendance FY1988 to FY2008
20-Year US CSG (25 Companies)**

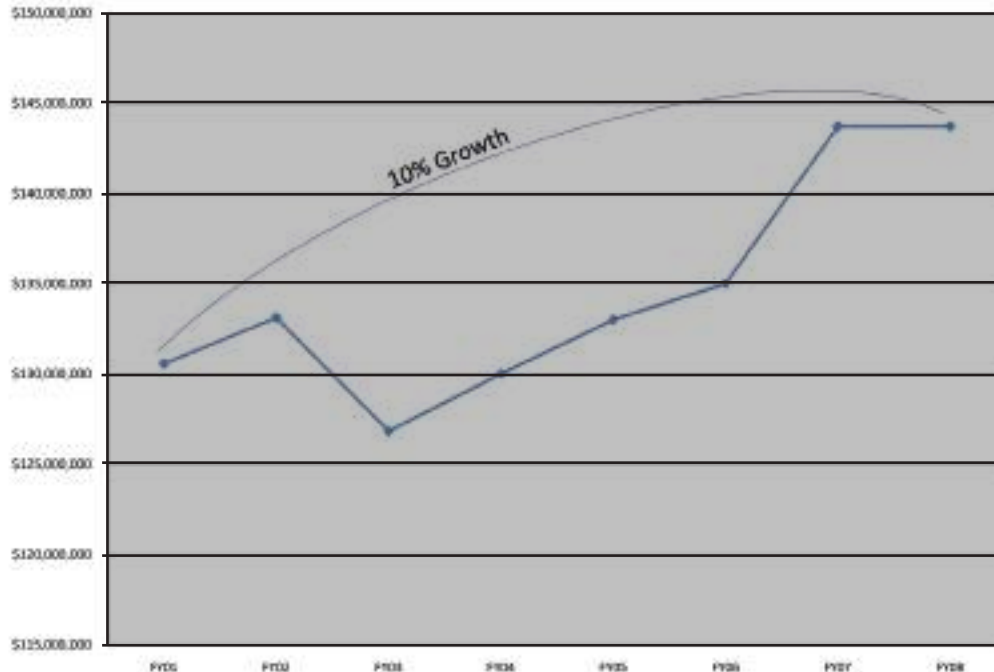


Main Season Ticket Revenue FY88 to FY08 20-Year US CSG (25 Companies)



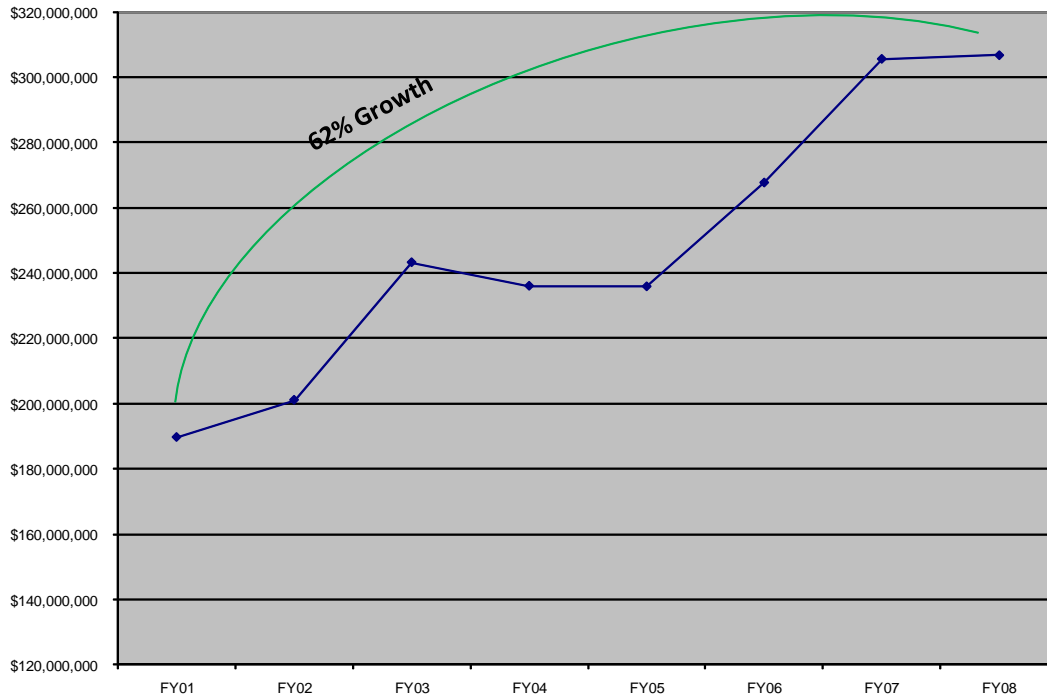
The charts on this page suggest that the rapid growth in ticket revenue, which has outpaced both inflation and the rise in the number of tickets sold, results from significant increases in ticket prices.

Main Season Ticket Revenue Since 2001 10-Year US CSG (46 Companies)

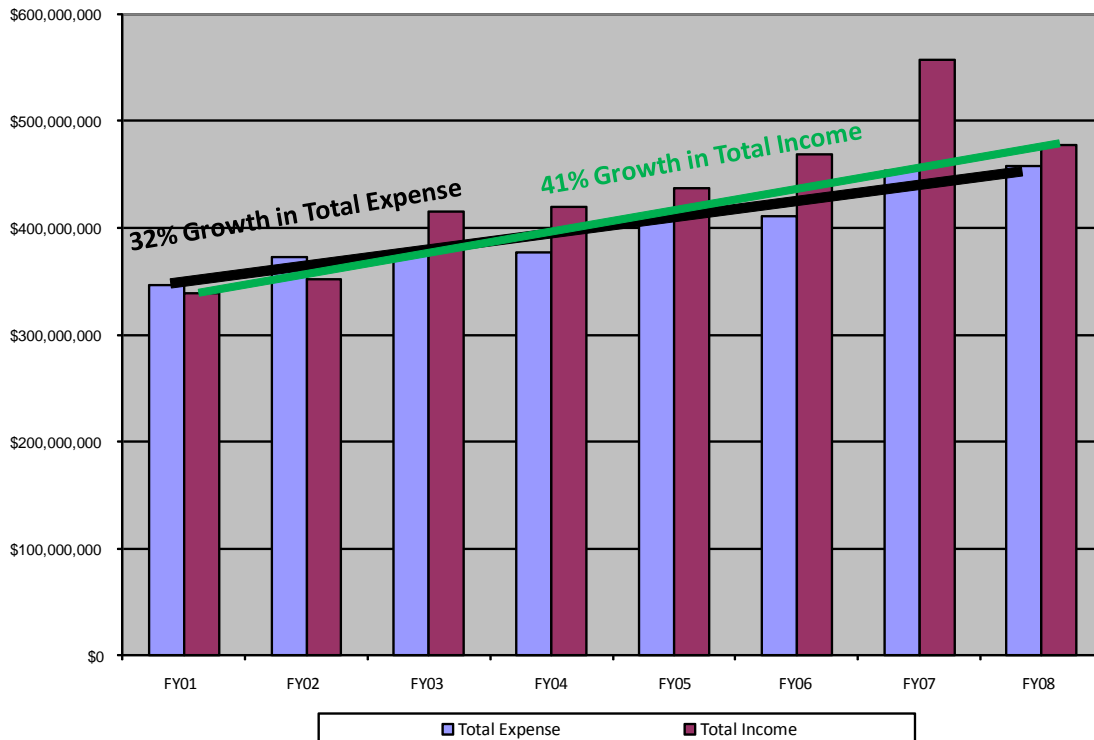


Despite the recent dip in attendance, increased contributions combined with higher ticket revenue has resulted in income growth that has consistently outpaced expense growth since 2001, allowing companies to build reserves.

Total Contributed Income Since FY2001 10-Year US CSG (46 Companies)

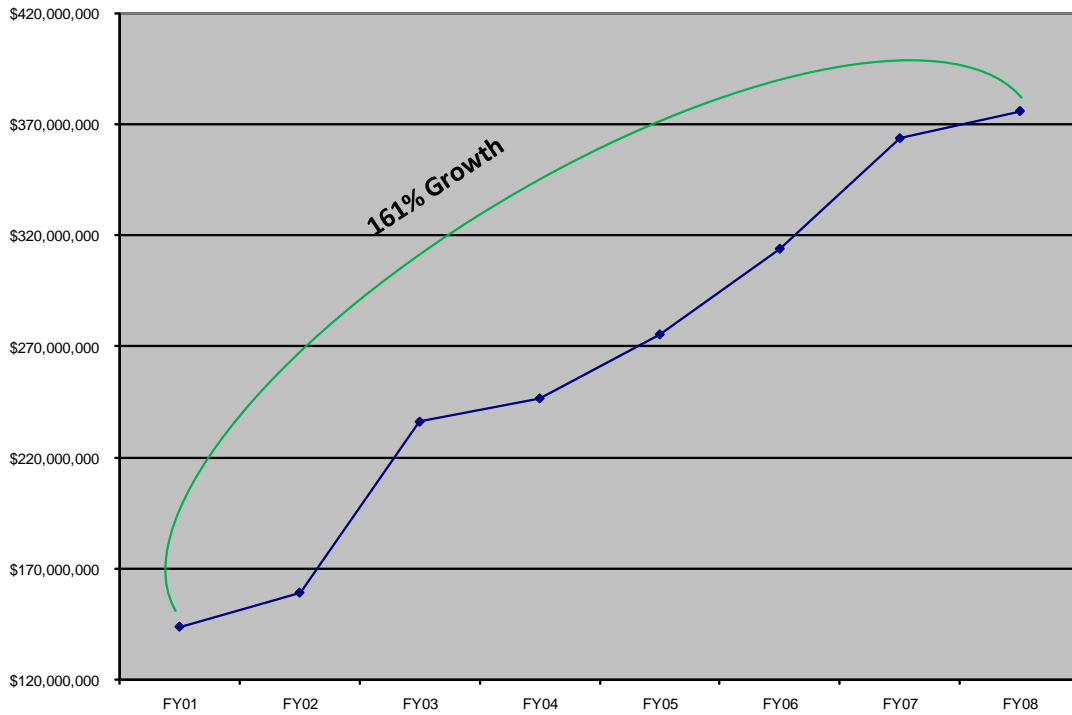


Total Income and Expense Since FY2001 10-Year US CSG (46 Companies)

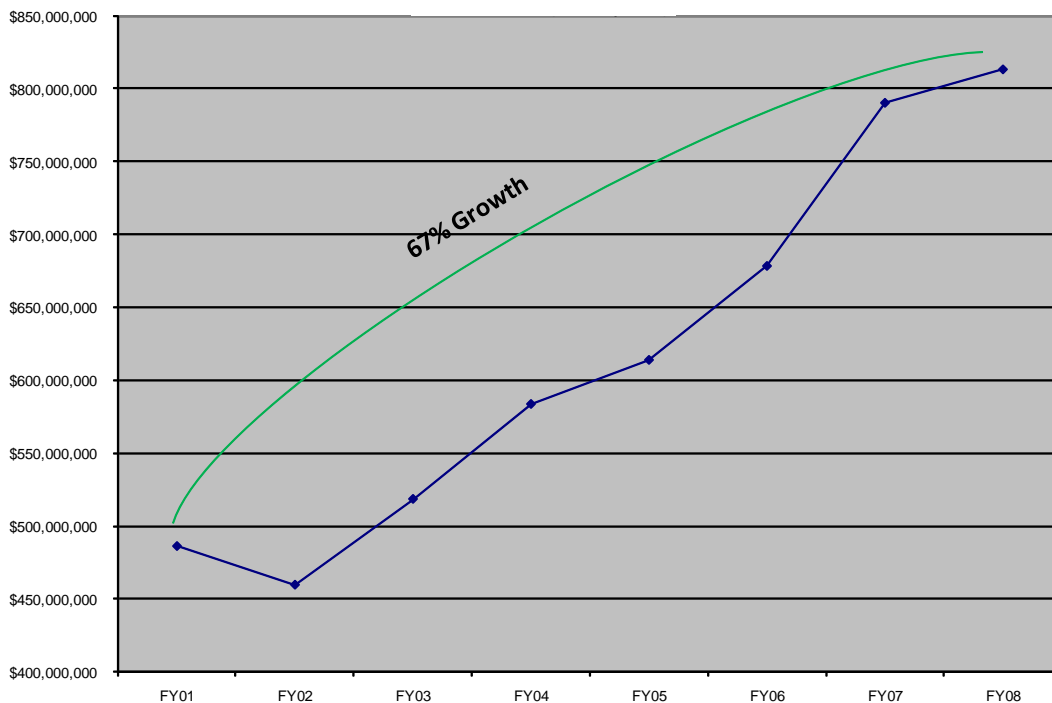


Company endowments, reflected as permanently-restricted net assets, have grown despite the dramatic decline in the equity markets, thanks to continued contributions from donors who see benefit in building endowments that will help sustain the art form over the long term. The nearly 70 percent rise in total net assets is the combined result of endowment growth, investment in buildings, and other capital projects and accumulated surpluses.

Permanently Restricted Net Assets Since FY2001 10-Year US CSG (46 Companies)



Total Net Assets Since FY2001 10-Year US CSG (46 Companies)



RECENTLY PUBLISHED

BY ALEXA B. ANTOPOL

Arts America

Jeffrey Compton, ed.
Huntington Press
ISBN13: 9781935396352

Arts America gives an inside arts scoop on 20 U.S. cities known for presenting the fine and performing arts, as well as major arts festivals throughout the country. *Arts America* provides important details for hundreds of arts organizations, including Web sites, public transportation options, handicapped access, hours and admission fees, along with strategies for saving money via free days, discounted performances, subscriptions and memberships, and myriad half-price opportunities. For many listings, the editors of *Arts America* share their observations and discuss background details that will enhance your understanding and enjoyment of the arts. Other aspects include how and why to prepare (or not prepare) for cultural events, where to find current arts information in all the *Arts America* cities, how to cut down on travel costs and related expenses, and how to improve the arts in your hometown.

Living Opera

Joshua Jampol
Oxford University Press
ISBN13: 9780195381382

Living Opera is a collection of 20 interviews with opera professionals working today. Performers such as Renée Fleming, Natalie Dessay,

Rolando Villazon and Plácido Domingo speak about their strengths and weaknesses, and address such topics as how they deal with critics, vocal troubles and balancing their career and family lives. Conductors such as James Conlon, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Kent Nagano discuss their likes and dislikes about the state of contemporary opera, their inspirations and whom they themselves hope to inspire. Directors such as Robert Carsen and Patrice Chereau discuss the complexities involved in staging a successful opera, and how opera can remain relevant today. The table of contents reads like a “who’s who” of the global opera world. Jampol is a freelance journalist and regular contributor to the “Ear for Opera” series in the *International Herald Tribune*, and has written for publications including *Time Magazine*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *The Guardian* and *The London Times*.

Richard Wagner and His World

Thomas S. Grey, ed.
Princeton University Press
ISBN13: 9781400831784

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) aimed to be more than just a composer. He set out to redefine opera as a “total work of art” combining the highest aspirations of drama, poetry, the symphony, the visual arts, even religion and philosophy. Equally celebrated and vilified in his own time, Wagner

continues to provoke debate today regarding his political legacy as well as his music and aesthetic theories. *Wagner and His World* examines his works in their intellectual and cultural contexts. Seven original essays investigate a variety of topics. In addition to the editor, the contributors are Karol Berger, Leon Botstein, Lydia Goehr, Kenneth Hamilton, Katherine Syer and Christian Thorau. Thomas S. Grey is professor of music at Stanford University. His books include *Wagner’s Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* and *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner*.

George Gershwin:
An Intimate Portrait
Walter Rimler
Illinois University Press
ISBN13: 9780252034442

In this volume, Walter Rimler makes use of fresh sources, including newly-discovered letters by Kay Swift, as well as correspondence between and interviews with intimates of Ira and Leonore Gershwin. George Gershwin lived with purpose and gusto, but with melancholy as well, for he was unable to make a place for himself — no family of his own and no real home in music. He and his siblings received little love from their mother and no direction from their father. Older brother and lyricist Ira managed to create a home when he married Leonore Strunsky, a hard-edged woman who lived for wealth and status. The closest George came to

domesticity was through his longtime relationship with Kay Swift. She was his lover, musical confidante and fellow composer. But she remained married to another man while he went endlessly from woman to woman. Only in the final hours of his life, when they were separated by a continent, did he realize how much he needed her. Fatally ill, unprotected by (and perhaps estranged from) Ira, he was exiled by Leonore from the house she and the brothers shared, and he died alone at the age of 38. Rimler is the author of *Not Fade Away: A Comparison of Jazz Age With Rock Era Pop Song Composers* and *A Gershwin Companion*. His articles and fiction have appeared in *Midstream*, *Prism International* and other publications.

Theaters 2: Partnerships in Facility Use, Operations, and Management

Holzman Moss Architecture,
JaffeHolden, Theatre Projects
Consultants
Images Publishing
ISBN13: 978186470343 6

When designing a theater, architects, acousticians and consultants must create a hub for the activities of actors, dancers and musicians, as well as a finely tuned space for directors, producers, technicians and the all-important public. A valuable resource for both architects and commissioning agents, this new title continues on from *Theaters* (2000) as a guide to building the

modern theater, concert hall and cultural centre. Holzman Moss Architecture has enjoyed a long history of planning and design for a wide range of academic, civic and private performance facilities. Holzman Moss Architecture has joined with JaffeHolden and Theatre Projects Consultants to present insights into the collaborative processes in the creation of performance spaces. *Theaters 2* will be of interest to and an invaluable resource for curators, artistic directors, actors, theater producers and managers, lighting designers, musicians, playwrights and performers. More than 40 projects, including theaters, auditoriums, concert halls and opera houses, are presented with color images, plans and drawings.

**Water Music:
Making Music in the Spas of
Europe and North America**
Ian Bradley
Oxford University Press
ISBN13: 9780195327342

Many composers — Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Chopin, Liszt and Dvorak, to name a few — spent periods in spa towns, whether taking the waters, searching for patrons among the clientele or soaking up the relaxing ambience. Concerts, recitals and resident orchestras have themselves played a major role in the therapeutic regimes and the social and cultural life of European and North American watering places since the late 18th century. To this day, these spa towns continue to host major music festivals of the highest caliber, drawing musicians and loyal audiences on both local and international levels. Music was a hugely important part of the experience of taking a spa cure: This book explores the music-making that went on in the spas and watering places in Europe

and the United States during their heyday between the early-18th and the mid-20th centuries. Author Ian Bradley is active in summer spa music festivals and is the author of more than 30 books.

**The Cambridge Companion
to Eighteenth-Century
Opera**
Anthony R. DelDonna and
Pierpaolo Polzonetti, Ed.s
Cambridge University Press
ISBN13: 9780521695381

Reflecting a wide variety of approaches to 18th-century opera, this volume brings together leading international experts in the field. Viewing opera as a complex and fascinating form of art and social ritual, rather than reducing it simply to music and text analysis, individual essays investigate aspects such as audiences, architecture of the theaters, marketing, acting style, and the politics and strategy of representing class and gender. Overall, the volume provides a synthesis of established knowledge, reflects recent research on 18th-century opera and stimulates further research. The reader is encouraged to view opera as a cultural phenomenon that can reveal aspects of our culture, both past and present. Eighteenth-century opera is experiencing continuing critical and popular success through innovative and provoking productions worldwide, and this *Companion* will appeal to opera goers as well as to students and teachers of this key topic. 📖

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