

Opera Today

Center for Contemporary Opera • P. O. Box 258, Island Station, New York, NY 10044-0205
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OPERA America Meeting for Patrons

A consortium of New York opera companies has been assembled by OPERA America to provide a program for a select group of 50 patrons from the U.S. Meetings will be held in New York City from March 27-30. Participants will go to Manhattan and Brooklyn to see work in progress of several companies. These visits will be augmented by discussions, lectures and dinners. The purpose is to provide greater insights into the inner workings of producing American opera believing, through greater understanding, support of American opera companies will increase. The program is intended to become an annual event. OPERA America is a membership organization of professional opera companies in the U.S. and Canada.

Patrons of the Center who live in the New York area may apply to CCO for further information and to request invitations. Please contact CCO, PO Box 258, Island Station, New York, NY 10044 or e-mail to:
conopera@mindspring.com

CCO Wins Telly Award



Eugène Ionesco, the father of “theater of the absurd,” was a Romanian writer living in Paris when he first read an English grammar book. This prompted him to create his deliciously absurd play *The Bald Soprano* in English. Martin Kalmanoff turned it into a charming opera which the Center produced in 1993. Following the stage performances, the opera was recreated for video by Ron Myrvik Productions with the inclusion of clever animation. This fall, the video was honored by receiving a national **Telly Award** given to non-commercial projects that have not been shown on national television. The video may be purchased by contacting the Cinema Guild, 130 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10016, (212) 685-6242.

e-mail delliott@cinemaguild.com

Where We're Going

Developing New Opera/Music Theater Works: Despite the gradual increase in performance of American operas, most of our opera composers (and it seems everyone is writing an opera these days!) do not have the hands-on experience gained only through seeing their works performed, a necessity in producing a successful work for the stage. It is one thing to sit at a piano imagining how your opera will work and another to see it performed before a live audience.



Richard Marshall

Because of the expense of mounting full-scale productions, other ways must be found to provide this kind of practical experience. Musical readings are of some assistance, but seeing a work staged is of far greater value. The Center's most recent experience was a staged reading of *Chéri* by Michael Dellaira and Susan Yankowitz. Their experience gained in evaluating the pacing of the work and the response of the audience to key dramatic moments has led to a number of significant changes. How much more valuable would be an extended workshop experience where the creators could see their work again as changes were implemented, much like the old pre-Broadway out-of-town runs of musicals and plays. With the elimination of sets, using nothing but rudimentary costumes, and with piano accompaniment, these experiences can be gained with minimal cost. I am recommending to my board that these multiple-workshops become a regular part of the Center's work.

Main-Stage Productions: Over the past two years, the Center has evolved a mixed program of experimental and traditional new works. *Kafka: Letter to My Father* and *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* by Stanley Walden are examples of more leading-edge pieces. This season Daron Hagen and Paul Muldoon's 'nightmare cabaret opera' *Vera of Las Vegas* will be performed in a cabaret setting at the Nimoy Thalia Theater at Symphony Space, plus a double bill of Eric Salzman and Valeria Vasilevski's *The True Last*

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Adamo Discusses “Little Women”



Mark Adamo

Mark Adamo, Composer-in-Residence at New York City Opera, and June LeBell, former voice of music for WQXR, appeared in a lively discussion about Adamo’s opera, *Little Women*.

The program called Conversation was held on December 2nd at the Mannes College of Music. Mr. Adamo, spurred on by insightful questions from Ms. LeBell, provided a view into his creative processes in composing the opera. Frequently jumping excitedly from his chair to illustrate points at the piano and by playing excerpts from the Houston Grand Opera production, he gave a detailed look at how he turned Louisa May Alcott’s treasured novel into an opera. This was part of an on-going program by the Center called “American Opera Today.”

Little Women may be seen this spring in a City Opera production.



Paul Kellogg To Be Honored



Paul Kellogg

Paul Kellogg, General and Artistic Director of New York City Opera, will receive the Center for Contemporary Opera’s **Award for Distinguished Service to American Opera** to be presented at the Center’s **Gala Benefit** on March 18th at the National Arts Club, Gramercy Park South in Manhattan. Since coming to City Opera, Mr. Kellogg has consistently included significant American operas in the company’s schedule, has inaugurated Showcase performances in which new works are given a reading with orchestra accompaniment, has encouraged the creation of new works, and has appointed of a series of composers-in-residence.

The Center’s Gala Benefit honors outstanding artists who have made significant contributions to American opera or helped in furthering the careers of young singers. Past honorees have included Phyllis Curtin, Angelina Reaux, Marilyn Horne, John Corigliano, Dawn Upshaw, and Lauren Flanigan.

If you wish to receive an invitation to this event, which includes a dinner and a musical program, please contact the Center for Contemporary Opera.

From Stockholm to Alaska

Margaret Kohler, a native of Alaska, and Karin Lovelius of Stockholm, Sweden won the ‘gold and silver’ at the 19th International Opera Singers Competition

The 19th International Opera Singers Competition was held on Sunday, October 13th at The Jewish Theological Seminary. Winners were Margaret Kohler, soprano, and Karin Lovelius, mezzo-soprano, while a career encouragement award was given to Lynn Norris of New York City.



Margaret Kohler

Born in Alaska, Margaret Kohler earned her college tuition by fishing for halibut and crab off Kodiak Island. Later she abandoned fishing for the opera and concert stage. She has sung with Opera Columbus, Opera Delaware, San Diego Opera; with symphonies in Columbus (OH), San Diego, and in New York with the New York Chamber Ensemble; and has recorded for Philip Glass

and for the Milken Foundation. Her recent *Pierrot Lunaire* was filmed and aired on public television.

Karin Lovelius has sung with Savonlinna Opera touring Sweden, with Opera Ystad and has appeared in the children’s opera *The Tinder-Box*. She has sung in Italy, and in Finland she sang in Thomas Adés opera *Powder Her Face*.



Karin Lovelius

Contestants are now applying to enter the competition from every continent—except Antarctica.... *Is there an opera for penguins?* Interested singers will find the application form at: www.conopera.org

The competition is held in New York late September or early October. The deadline for entry is May 15th.

NewOp Vienna



Eric Salzman

NewOp, a moveable feast, took place in Vienna, Austria, from November 14 to 17, 2003. The city of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, Berg, Webern and Schoenberg, played host to the eleventh annual meeting of what used to be known as the Conference on Small-Scale Opera and New Music-Theater, a name now abbreviated (perhaps over-abbreviated) to the rather jazzy NewOp.

NewOp started at the Monnaie Theater in Brussels in 1993 and has since played in Colmar (Alsace, France), Amsterdam, Antwerp, Cambridge (England), Copenhagen, and Oslo. It has taken place twice in North America, both times in Canada: at Toronto in 1995 and Montréal in 1999. The idea was and is to bring together a diverse group of people—composers, directors, writers, dramaturgs, producers, performers, designers – working in new opera and music-theater in many parts of the world with the possibility of exchanging ideas, looking at (and listening to) work and even creating collaborations.

By the middle of the 20th century, the age-old creative interaction between music and theater had broken down. Modern music was predominantly instrumental and abstract. Modern opera either had a retro feel to it or was hermetically sealed. Even the popular musical fell on hard times or was overwhelmed by nostalgia. Then, by the end of the century, things began to change. Contemporary opera and music-theater took on new life in both the Old World and New. Suddenly it seemed as though everyone – well, almost everyone – wanted to create new music-theater or write/compose/produce new opera.

The advent of NewOp was a direct result of this rather remarkable historical moment. NewOp showed just how widespread this phenomenon was by bringing together that which had been put asunder. There were, it seemed, a lot of people in a lot of places reinventing the wheel, often without any awareness of what was going on down the street. It took someone from New York to introduce Michel Rostain, the director of a major French music-theater company, to the organizers of NewOp in Belgium!

This latest NewOp, held in conjunction with the Wien Modern Festival, had its usual stimulating mix of locals with visitors from Europe and North America and a strong collection of panels, video and audio showings, discussions and schmooze sessions. Probably the most unusual participant was a composer from Tirana, Albania, but there were other visitors from Bulgaria and Hungary, from the U.S. and Canada, as well as most Western European countries including Luxembourg. Several live performances illustrated the

collaborative and cross-cultural nature of the proceedings. These included the opening “performative” session with Kristin Norderval and *Cassandra*, a music-theater work that actually grew out of NewOp. The piece was created for this Norwegian-American “extended-voice” singer and the first version was workshopped at NewOp10 in Oslo. The Vienna version was an expanded and staged performance directed by Valeria Vasilevski. The text, which combines the classic myth with several contemporary themes, is by Eva Salzman with a score by the undersigned that uses Ms. Norderval’s exceptional skills as singer, actress, musician, sound maker, computer programmer and arranger all expressed in the form of a 25-minute monodrama played straight out at the audience. Other performances included a multi-lingual collaborative work by the genial NewOp11 organizer Thomas Dezsy, with three German colleagues on the subject of *Marx* (Karl not Groucho) and a setting by the veteran music-theater composer Georges Aperghis of a French translation of an enigmatic text by the German writer Heinrich Müller. The final event was a panel that included the writer of this notice, Aperghis and Michel Rostain with Dezsy as moderator. All of us had founded and directed music-theater performance ensembles over a period of two or three decades and both Aperghis and myself have worked with Rostain over the years. Here were the big themes of NewOp: collaboration, creating new work and creating a milieu for the performance of new work. Opera and music theater are age-old forms but they have, it seems, to be reinvented every generation or two. I have emphasized the live performances (partly because I was involved in one of them) but many more works were displayed in video and audio form. Ultimately, the discussions and personal interactions – formal and informal – were equally important for most of the participants.

Next year, NewOp will go to Rotterdam and, in all likelihood, to Germany the year after. It has never taken place in this country but the time is certainly ripe. NewOp/New York in 2005, anyone? —Eric Salzman

Eric Salzman is Associate Artistic Director of the Center for Contemporary Opera and a long-time creator of new music-theater. His *Cassandra*, with text by his daughter, London-based poet Eva Salzman, will be performed in the 2003/4 season by Kristin Norderval in New York, Paris and Germany.

Where We’re Going - continued from p. 1

Words of Dutch Schultz coupled with John Cage and Kenneth Patchen’s *The City Wears a Slouch Hat*. In coming seasons we hope to produce more conventional works like the previously performed *Summer* and *Markheim* and avant-garde compositions that represent the parameters of our evolving opera/music theater in the 21st century.

—Richard Marshall

CCO Membership Application - 2003 Season

Membership in the Center for Contemporary Opera has its rewards. For a tax-deductible contribution of \$50 or more, you will receive a one-year membership; copies of **Opera Today**, the Center's newsletter; notification of all Center programs; and invitations to opera previews, the Gala Benefit and other special events. Please make your check payable to: **Center for Contemporary Opera** and mail it with this coupon to:

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 18

**"Gala Benefit" honoring Paul Kellogg
National Arts Club**

March 27-30

OPERA America meeting in New York for patrons

April 14

**Competition Winners' Recital, Weill Recital Hall
Raemond Martin, baritone
Arietha Lockhart, soprano**

June 26 & 27

New York premiere, *Vera of Las Vegas*

TBA

***The Last True Words of Dutch Schultz
& The City Wears a Slouch Hat***

Center for Contemporary Opera

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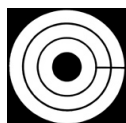
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