

World Opera Forum Flashback

Read on for our selection from the many incisive contributions in Madrid.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Challenging *status quo* is one of the basic aspects of any aesthetic information. That's the main legacy of tradition: a range of accepted codes that can be altered in a way that achieves new possibilities, new meanings.

Joan Matabosch, Artistic Director Teatro Real Madrid

If we want to build a more egalitarian and fraternal world, culture has a fundamental role. Definition of heritage is a cultural battle in Latin America.

Daniela Bouret, General Director Teatro Solís Montevideo

Heritage is cultural memory, which makes us human.

Norman Rosenthal, former Director of Exhibitions Royal Academy of Arts

The canon only exists in the present tense. We refresh it by dealing with it in a different way. Let us not become a museum!

Stephen Langridge, Artistic Director GöteborgsOperan

The canon is 400 years of white men. It needs to be expanded to include more music theatre, find new makers, new meaning.

Daniel Kramer, Artistic Director English National Opera

Heritage is strong stories from literature: Hamlet, Orestes... In Graz, we have introduced new stories to our audience: Candide, Ariane...

Nora Schmid, Intendantin Oper Graz

In Chicago, we search for new works which reflect our stories.

Lidiya Yankovskaya, Music Director Chicago Opera Theater

It is the establishment that is dying, not opera or classical music... There is no progress without disruption.

Carlos Vicente, Director of Marketing Sarasota Opera



'Fishbowl' debate on Cultural Heritage facilitated by Robert Marx

You hear of a car company's heritage? Naturally, no. I think something not to progress from a certain point is called 'heritage'. To stop progress means death.

Tsuyoshi Yamaguchi, Secretary-General Tokyo Nikikai Opera Foundation

It is on the peripheries where you find radical change brewing. To those who fear that tradition is suffocating opera, I would say: keep the pipeline to the periphery open, and both sides will receive the oxygen they need.

Yuval Sharon, Artistic Director of The Industry in Los Angeles

There are opportunities to dispel fears when breaking out of traditional theatres, but danger of losing the spirit.

Birgit Meyer, Intendantin Oper Köln

Shared cultural heritage is a complicated idea in a multi-racial world.

Cayenne Harris, Vice-President Lyric Opera of Chicago

The only thing more expensive than opera is war.

James Robinson, Artistic Director Opera Theater of St Louis

Summaries

Common goals include building strong and bigger communities by balancing newly composed work and repertoire and new contexts and performing venues.

Elisabetta Villa, Opera Management alumna, Como

Heritage understood as memory is not equal for all; to respond to modern society needs, opera should be more inclusive and open to the richness of different heritages, as regards both artists and public.

Katarzyna Frątczak, Opera Management Course alumna, Poznań

The genius of some works outlasts generations; it is our responsibility to reinterpret them to ensure their relevance and survival into the future.

Sam Brown, Opera Management Course alumnus, London

Cultural heritage evolves. The fittest will survive. We need to become both more inclusive and more discerning, but heritage will take care of itself.

Nicholas Payne

NEW WORK

Composers should learn by writing songs for a voice.

*Janis Susskind, Managing Director
Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers*

Are the right people writing operas? For a musical work to live, many people have to fall in love with it... We know that our art form can fill a house, when great singers enact a story of universal power... New work will regain its place at the heart of opera when it dares to speak to the many, and not just to the few.

Jonathan Dove, composer

We have changed as a global culture, and thus our stories must also change.

Kamala Sankaram, composer

At least 50% of our programmes should consist of works of the 20th and 21st centuries, and I am not talking about Puccini and Strauss... If more composers were to work with librettists, choreographers and visual artists of their own time, the broad audiences of contemporary art, literature and dance might well find an avenue into new opera.

*Jan Vandenhouwe, Director-designate
Opera Vlaanderen*

Opera is about interior life. It is not prescriptive. Encounter revelation through a window into wonder... Much bad opera has been based on good films or plays.

*Richard Mills, Artistic Director
Victorian Opera Melbourne*

People are easily bored. My new opera combines theatre, vaudeville, operetta.

Elena Langer, composer

From left to right: Dietrich Grosse and Guy Coolen, Kamala Sankaram, Janis Susskind, Richard Mills, Lauri Pokkinen, Matthew Aucoin and David T. Little, Larry Edelson

Write for your own ensemble and company, as Britten did for the English Opera Group. Do it yourself!

Matthew Aucoin, composer

My opera is lower-middle-class Dublin background brought to life... There is an electricity of working with a librettist and your own ensemble.

Donnacha Dennehy, composer

Companies can no longer hire the same old demographic to run their companies. Seek out those outsider voices who have a record of championing outsider work. Steal them from the theater and film world... New work by new voices can't help but be subversive. 'Leopards break into the temple and drink all the sacred vessels dry; it keeps happening; in the end, it is incorporated into the ritual. Seek out the leopards. Hire them.

Donna Di Novelli, writer/librettist

You want a musical Dramaturg to ask: what are you saying in those eight measures which are saying nothing?

Mark Campbell, librettist

The problem is that we are not fostering high quality new work. Many opera companies are not embracing the potential of these operas and the artists writing them to engage contemporary audiences. The problem is, we are scared. Scared of failure – but perhaps there are some who are scared of success.

*Larry Edelson, Artistic Director
American Lyric Theater*

Summaries

We set a high bar in opera for success or failure. Unlike theatre, opera is presented without previews, putting huge pressure on the premiere. Should we rethink the way we present new work to enable composers to revise and adjust? Companies have a responsibility to nurture and develop both librettists and composers so they may hone their craft in a fertile environment.

*Tamzin Aitken, Opera Management
Course alumna, London*

The enemy of opera is bad opera. How do we work to make it better?

There is a need to set attainable targets for both quantity and quality.

Nicholas Payne



DIVERSITY

The widest range of talent creates the most successful company, in business or in arts. Diversity means difference: in gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic background, class, geographic identity... The aim is to change the process, so the product is different. What is daunting about that?

Lucy Kerbel, Founder and Director Tonic Theatre

Change must come from the top. It's a leadership issue.

Odaline de la Martinez, composer and conductor

People must be prepared to give up and step aside to make space. Women of colour are held back by the 'emerging artist' label. They must be determined to prove they are as good or better. We lack resources, but the well of talent runs deep. Offer access and opportunity at the starting point.

Chi-chi Nwanoku, musician and founder director of Chineke!

You have to want it enough. Then you make it happen... The problem is we talk about it too much. Begin by making desires visible and measure against targets. Invite audiences who demand recognition. Loosen what opera performance is. Offer stories we can share. Grow richer and fuller.

Graham Vick, Director Birmingham Opera Company

You just have to do it... Not enough to have taken actions.

Nadege Souvenir, Associate Vice-President Community Impact Minnesota

Diversity is. It's not something you do. Racial and cultural equity applies not just in opera. It is demanding we are seen in our fullness. Sure, 450 years of history is an obstacle, but we need to free imagination and creativity.

Keryl McCord, President & CEO Equity Quotient Atlanta

It is a combination of risk and opportunity. Opera is risk averse to changing the system. Let's talk about opportunities, not risk... Where is the next great opera, going out into the world and welcoming people in?
Michael Mori, General Director Tapestry Opera Ontario

I have never seen an opera about Afro-American love; it's always about struggle... The audience is too insular.

Mark Kent, President The Biome Foundation St Louis

I grew up in South African apartheid, when everyone on stage and in the audience was white. Now it is 80% black on stage, reflecting the country's demographic, but still work to do in management and Board.

Matthew Wild, Artistic Director Cape Town Opera

Create repertoire which reflects diversity; stories of our time, urban agenda.

Huang Ruo, composer

Composers are excited by the possibilities of opera, and the opportunities to tell stories of our time.

Errollyn Wallen, composer

Change the mode of thinking. Throw away unworthy elements. Administration and direction need to challenge both audiences and staff... New work needs to bring people and technology together. Art should meet the world. It is a prophet which foretells what is coming.

Grace Lang, Programme Director Hong Kong Arts Festival

Summaries

Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. It must be supported and protected, by valuing individuals and groups free from prejudice, and by fostering a climate where equity and mutual respect are intrinsic. 'Diversity' means more than acknowledging and/or tolerating difference. All aspects of diversity are equally important: gender, age, socio-economic background, disability, sexual orientation, religion as much as race; and they are interlinked.

Sara Mohammed Al-Hinai, Opera Management alumna, Muscat

Opera needs to act now on diversity. Positive discrimination is demanded. Not quotas, but your own timed action plan. Chineke! and Birmingham Opera are examples of what can be done. Plan for change.

Nicholas Payne



Graham Vick, Nadege Souvenir and Matthew Wild



The orchestra Chineke! with conductor Anthony Parnter

ADVOCACY

What does opera want to advocate for? Why does opera matter? Why should we continue to support it? Why don't we tell its human stories?

Philip Kennicott, Senior Art and Architecture Critic Washington Post

Opera is one of the most versatile forms of art. It illustrates the increasing convergence between heritage and creation. Opera is a most remarkable part of European cultural heritage; and 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Opera is rejuvenated by the digital revolution, which creates enormous opportunities for an art that some people consider elitist, obsolete, unable to survive without public support or disconnected with our societies.

That is why we support Opera Vision, which is not just a great project for opera lovers but gives everyone free access to culture, and also to European values.

Michel Magnier, Director Education & Culture European Commission

Stories matter. Which stories we tell, who we cast to tell them, and how we then tell those stories are the most critical factors in the survival of our art form... Opera is the vision of the world we hope to see.

Ahn Le, Publications & Brand Manager Opera Theater of St Louis

Is there a case for public value in our democracy, or is opera too special for everyday use? Is there a future in which opera is available for everyone in your neighbourhood at accessible prices?

Tracy Wilson, Director of Community Relations Cincinnati Opera

Changes are happening in the field of opera: creation, living artists, residencies; audience renewal and enlargement; international dialogue about how to change the world of opera. It is no longer imposing a colonial model, but sharing experiments so that they will not be experiments any more but might transform the world of opera. The more local you work, the more global you get.

Bernard Focroulle, Directeur Général Festival d'Aix-en-Provence

The golden humanitarianism of the arts is undercut by the pervasiveness of divisive politics, self-centred consumerism and a widespread backlash against immigration and diversity. Paradoxically, there is no better time to take action.

Umberto Fanni, General & Artistic Director Royal Opera House Muscat

Convey measurable facts about artistic, economic and social added value: key economic indicators; strategic use of Big Data; harness the digital shift to build an eco-system reaching beyond opera; funding frameworks combining public and private support; fiscal union to encourage transnational giving.

Edilia Gänz, Director Fedora

Children need to know why access to art, music, opera is part of their human rights. It involves the search for meaning and identity.

Valérie Chevalier, Directrice Générale Opéra-Orchestre de Montpellier

Opera is only recently transplanted to Korea. It's important that education and outreach shows it is not boring. Our audience will be your audience someday.

Bohyon Shin, Director External Affairs Korean National Opera

What can opera offer to give to people in need? Children or dementia sufferers respond to quality, but they don't ask why.

Birgit Meyer Intendantin Oper Köln

We have to confront lack of interest, time, money. We have to be advocates.

Dubravka Vrgoč, Director Croatian National Opera Zagreb

Summaries

First, opera has to strengthen its community by becoming more visible. Second, opera has to measure its social return on investment. Finally opera needs to strengthen its relationship to politics and speak the language of its stakeholders.

Anne Beyrer, Opera Management Course alumna, Karlsruhe

Advocacy requires a larger meta-level conversation as stakeholders may be located outside Opera's familiar boundaries. It would be more effective if it spoke with one voice; or if a stronger lobby could influence decision makers by measuring and demonstrating how the community benefits from its action.

Francesca Pecoraro, Opera Management Course alumna, Napoli

Advocacy is the hardest task in a crowded and noisy world. The arts and the education of the mind are the dividend of peace. Peace is better than war; and even opera is cheaper than war. Time is short to coordinate a global initiative, but we must make progress before committing to another World Opera Forum.

Nicholas Payne

The World Opera Forum organisers with keynote speaker José Manuel Barroso (centre)

