

FY 2011-2012 ANNUAL REPORT

Programs. Since March 2011, Toledo Opera has been operating under a new maxim: Sound Vision. For the 2011-2012 year, the Opera produced Verdi's *La traviata* on October 14 and 16, 2011 at the Valentine Theatre, a Gala concert at the Peristyle Theater on February 11, 2012 and its final production of the season, a semi-staged version of Puccini's *Turandot* on May 11, 2012 at the Peristyle Theater. In a year of restructuring, those three productions fulfilled the two requirements of Sound Vision: they were acclaimed for their high artistic quality **and** the costs of each one were within the company's financial capacity.

James Meena, General Director of Opera Carolina, served as Artistic Director and Conductor of the fully staged, sold-out production of *La traviata*. Maestro Meena supervised the casting of principal artists, with Sarah Jane McMahon as Violetta, Jonathan Boyd as Alfredo Germont and Scott Bearden as Georgio Germont. The Opera Gala Concert, entitled *From Vienna to Paris to New York*, featured opera selections from Mozart, Bizet and Bernstein. The program was developed and conducted by Stefan Sanderling, Principal Conductor of the Toledo Symphony Orchestra. Five vocal artists, including three sopranos, a tenor and a baritone, made the Gala a festive, joyful evening. *Turandot* was semi-staged and featured principal artists on the Peristyle Theater stage with the Toledo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Stefan Sanderling, a sixty-member chorus and a 16-member children's chorus. The production was directed by Marc Verzatt, *Classical Singer* magazine's Outstanding Stage Director of the Year in 2006. Mr. Verzatt specializes in making semi-staged opera exciting and inventive. Under his direction, vocal artists and orchestra together achieved a performance full of drama and glorious music.

Toledo Opera continued to provide its education and outreach programs for elementary and secondary students throughout northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan. The 2012 Opera on Wheels production, *The RING*, based on the operas of Wagner's Ring Cycle, was performed 64 times in 60 elementary schools by four Resident Artists and a collaborative pianist. High school and middle school students attended one Student Night at the Opera, the final dress rehearsal of Verdi's *La traviata*, on October 12, 2012. There were 620 students and teachers/or parents at the performance.

Most artistically challenging program. The most artistically challenging programming was the production of *Turandot*. This opera demands much from vocal artists and the symphony orchestra. For example, not many sopranos take on the role of the Princess Turandot. Jane Eaglen, a Wagnerian specialist at Baldwin-Wallace University, recommended Ohio native Amy Yekel, who performed the role brilliantly and to great acclaim by critics and the audience. A second challenge was fulfilling the vision of Stage Director Marc Verzatt. Parts of his vision were difficult to set up, including: two large double staircases at either side of the stage for both dramatic entrances and exits and some of the stage action; and a continuing series of Chinese art works (paintings and prints) projected onto a large screen above the orchestra. Finally, vocal artists had only a five-day rehearsal period in which to absorb fairly

complex staging. The challenges were successfully met, as this exciting and original production captivated audience members.

Financial Challenges during the year. In 2011-2012, Toledo Opera met the challenge, set by its Board of Directors, to fully fund each production before committing to it. Therefore, the Opera ended its fiscal year within budget. In addition, the Opera was able to raise funds to pay down a portion of its line of credit. The Opera continues to operate under its Sound Vision maxim, balancing artistic vision with sound fiscal management.

Evaluation of programming and operations. To evaluate its main stage programming, the Opera relied on informal measures such as audience reaction to performances and newspaper reviews. Results from those two measures were very positive for all three productions. Attendance numbers were also considered as a measure of audience interest in the productions offered. *La traviata*, as could be expected, was sold out. The performance of *Turandot* was close to a sell out (1,400 out of 1,600 seats filled). While not as well known as *La traviata*, *Turandot* has a number of famous arias, including the tenor solo, "Nessun dorma." The Opera Gala was less successful in terms of audience numbers. While an Opera Gala is scheduled for the 2012-2013 season, the Opera is looking closely at whether it is a viable format.

The quality and impact of the Opera's two education programs, Opera on Wheels and Student Night at the Opera, were evaluated through surveys sent to principals and teachers immediately following their students' experiences with opera. The Opera on Wheels touring production of Wagner's *The RING* was rated very positively on all evaluation questions. In response to several comments regarding the "dark" nature of Wagner, the Opera has selected a comic opera for 2013. The Artistic Director of Opera on Wheels will create a modern-day adaptation of Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* called *The Italian Girl*.

Finally, in this year of restructuring, the opera's operating procedures and staffing underwent review and revision. All company official documents were revised and updated, including vision and mission statements, code of regulations, board responsibilities, financial policies and procedures and gift receipt policies. An audit, the first in a number of years, was completed for fiscal year 2010-2011. A full-time Patron Services Manager was hired, who is in charge of ticketing and audience development initiatives. Two part-time contractual positions were filled, including Production Coordinator and Communications Coordinator. The latter staff member manages the web site, social media and program ad sales and assists in audience development.

What we did to engage the community to participate in our programs. By postponing the final opera of the 2010-2011, a crisis of confidence existed within the community that made communication about the state of the opera and its future programs of critical importance. The Opera hired a marketing specialist on a contractual basis, Ashley Mirakian, who is also Marketing Director of the Toledo Symphony Orchestra and specializes in the performing arts. The Opera also hired a graphic designer to develop a new logo with ancillary design materials. With this new look and its new maxim, Sound Vision, the Opera began developing a brand that would appear in all print and web advertising materials. At the same time, the

Opera worked with a local firm, Toledo.com, to rebuild its web site. Throughout the year, the new look communicated to the community that Toledo Opera was back and better than ever. Since subscriptions were not available in 2011-2012, each of the three productions had to be sold separately and this was effectively done with a combination of bold print ads and wide radio ad exposure.

Motivation for participating in Toledo Opera. An important part of Toledo Opera's vision is to be a vital part of the region's cultural community. Achievement of that vision is evident in the high participation rate of patrons and volunteers. Opera patrons indicate that they appreciate being able to experience live, professional opera that takes place in northwest Ohio and is reasonably priced. The Opera's volunteer chorus members, over 70 adults and children, love being part of professional productions, where they work with principal vocal artists, renowned directors and conductors, and the Toledo Symphony Orchestra. The 150 Toledo Opera Guild members enjoy monthly meetings with an opera emphasis and they contribute significantly to opera productions and education programs through their fund-raising events. Based on a Board Retreat in September 2011 led by an outside consultant, the Board of Directors and its committees have put much time and talent this year into ensuring that the Opera's policies and operating procedures result in "Sound Vision" both artistically and financially.