

Opera's Next Wave

By F. Paul Driscoll and Brian Kellow

With a tumultuous economy, the advent of HD screenings and the ongoing march of the technological revolution, the opera world is going through a period of profound change. What will the opera landscape look like ten years from now? OPERA NEWS's editors have chosen twenty-five names – and one venue – we believe are poised to break out and become major forces in the field in the coming decade.

ANNE MANSON conductor

You really don't want to start a conversation with Anne Manson by asking her about the struggles she's endured as a female conductor. It's a thuddingly obvious question to put to someone with such a distinctive professional profile. She has sought out the unusual — or perhaps the unusual has sought her out. Among the works she has conducted are Peter Maxwell Davies's *Kommilitonen!* at the Juilliard School; Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* at New York City Opera; Jonathan Dove's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* at Minnesota Opera; and Philip Glass's *Orphée* and *Galileo* at Portland Opera. This month, she's at the Aspen Festival, leading the reduced orchestration of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*. "John supervised the reduction and approved it," says Manson. "I think the hope is that this will make it more feasible to perform the piece in a general way. He's also made a couple of short cuts in it — and I think it will be interesting to see if this gives the piece new life. The danger of *The Great Gatsby* is that the audience is seduced by the dance and period music. The other music is overlooked and in fact quite beautiful and extremely evocative."

Like practically every other working musician of her generation, Manson is concerned with building audiences for opera. She gets slightly defensive when it's suggested to her that the question of education and outreach is dwarfing all other discussions in the opera industry. "The fact is that access and outreach are very important," she says. "It's crucial, particularly to new works. There is a

fair amount of contemporary American opera being performed in this country. It's varying in quality — some very good things, some that are borderline. What's more worrying, really, is that companies are folding and cutting down the number of performances, and using lots of young artists instead of stars. There are a lot of mid-level American singers who are excellent, and their meat and potatoes are evaporating at the moment. They're being replaced by younger and cheaper singers."

There's no point in avoiding the big question any more. Manson pauses for a moment, recalling a study entitled "The Perceived Delicacy of the Female Conductor," in which reactions to a performance of Brahms's First Symphony, conducted by Marin Alsop, varied wildly according to whether the listeners thought the conductor was a man or woman. "I think maybe things are changing more slowly on the opera podium than they are in the orchestral sphere in this country," says Manson. "When I walk into the rehearsal room, I am something different from what people's expectations are. And that has not changed very much in the past twenty-five years — but I sure hope it will."



Anne Manson