

20
21



MILWAUKEE
OPERA
THEATRE

SEASON
SUMMARY

Our most precious memories from the 2020-21 Season are of artists and audiences helping each other through the tragedies around us, both personal and national, with empathy, patience, creativity, and kindness.

We produced, or co-produced, *Orsa Ibernata*, *Enchanted Park(ing Lot)*, *In The Cloud*, *The Sound*, *Expanse*, and *L'Orfeo*.

We hosted 12 Voice Labs, commissioned a song for KidsWrites, created an intro to opera video for the Red Wing MN school district, delivered art song to St Ann Center for Intergenerational Care, and supported Script & Score at Parkside School for the Arts.

SEASON REVIEW

In fall, we joined the Decameron Opera Coalition, a plucky ensemble of 9 indie companies from across the US, united to cultivate new opera. Our first large scale commission, *Tales from a Safe Distance*, was viewed on 6 continents, in 17 Countries, and in 43 States/Territories. In March, it was entered into the Covid-19 Response Collection at the Library of Congress, a collection of original scores, scripts, and choreography inspired by quarantine and the pandemic.

In October, we reunited with collaborative BFFs at Danceworks to present a weekend of art song in their parking lot. The weather was fierce, and audiences in ponchos and snow pants demonstrated to us, not just Midwestern Grit, but their deep appreciation of live performance.

Over the winter, we retreated indoors to host 14 Zoom "Zoirées" featuring newly commissioned work by area creators. **In January**, we unveiled *In The Cloud*, Matt Zembrowski's 18 minute musical about a family of three facing the pandemic. Directed by Catie O'Donnell, *In The Cloud* was filmed over two weeks using only devices the actors had in their homes.

In February, we developed *The Sound* with SistaStrings, a new music video and love letter to Milwaukee, from Chauntee and Monique Ross. Our friends at Traveling Lemur helped us knit together performance, puppetry and protest footage from the sisters' own cell phones into their first, but certainly not last, music video.

In May, we participated in "The Resurrection Project," a collaboration pairing high school film students with professional composers and librettists to create a new work inspired by the idea of resurrection.

And finally, **in June**, fully vaccinated and without masks, we were able to experience the JOY of singing together for the first time in a very long time by presenting excerpts from our new translation of *L'Orfeo* at the Florentine Opera Center. Just hearing audiences mingle with each other again was profoundly moving.

THE NUMBERS

We reached an audience of over **8,730** people (and counting)

We produced, or co-produced **46** performances

Of the **\$33,711** we spent on those performances, **\$29,138** was paid directly to artists in fees, stipends, and commissions.

Of the **\$29,138** we paid directly to artists, 90% was spent on local talent, supporting our bedrock belief that investing in area talent creates a thriving community.

With healthy box office and generous support from grants and individual donors, we were able to end our season in the black, as we have done each year since we were founded.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE ARTISTS AND ORGANIZATIONS WE WORKED WITH IN 2020-2021:

Elizabeth Ahlstrom, **Angry Young Men**, **AntiShadows LLC**, **Aperi Animam**, Baine Avent, Austin Bare, Elizabeth Blood, Danny Brylow, Emanuel Camacho, Alaina Carlson, Steve Cook, **Danceworks MKE**, Cecilia Davis, **Decameron Opera Coalition**, Raven Dockery, **Encore Theatrical Lighting**, Janna Ernst, **Film North**, Colin Gawronski, Liz Getschow, Shen Heckel, Kaisa Herrmann, Shawn Holmes, Jennifer Jakubowski, Alisha Jihn, Joseph Krohlow, Dani Kuepper, Nekea Leon, Mike "Ding!" Lorenz, Nicole McCarty, Norman Moses, **Nautilus Music-Theater**, Catie O'Donnell, Billy Ray Olsen, Shane O'Neil, Jim Padovano, Rae Elizabeth Paré, Josh Perkins, Julianne Perkins, Maria Pretzl, Joe Riggerbach, Ivy Robertson, Johanna Rose, Chauntee Ross, Monique Ross, Allen Russell, Nathaniel Schardin, Becky Schulz, Kevin Sievert, **Silver City Studios**, Maggie Seer, Tiana Sorenson, Chelsea Strebe, Shayne Steliga, Gabi Sustache, **Traveling Lemur Productions**, Christal Wagner, Angela Weidner, Nathan Wesselowski, Marilyn White, Crawford Wiley, Jackie Willis, Joshua Yang, and Matt Zembrowski



FROM THE CRITICS

ENCHANTED PARK(ING LOT)

“Together, Milwaukee Opera Theatre and Danceworks took an eerie moment in theater history and found a way to make magic.” — *Kelsey Lawler, BroadwayWorld*

ORSA IBERNATA

“A minimalist emotional journey of hauntingly moody simplicity.” — *Russ Bickerstaff, The Small Stage*

“From the moment composer-soprano Elizabeth Blood begins intoning ‘brambles and weeds’ with a trilled R, the listeners know they have entered sacred space”

— *Karen Alenier, The Dressing*

IN THE CLOUD

“For the first time in ten months I felt like I was part of a collective moment, giving artists the adulation that they earned.” — *Gwen Rice, GwendolynRice.com*

THE SOUND

“What resonated most with me was the joy worn on the sleeve of each and every artist involved in *The Sound*. Even the limitations of Zoom couldn’t muddy their glorious music.”

— *Kelsey Lawler, Planet Kelsey*



L'Orfeo, Pictured: Jackie Willis,
Photo Credit: Mark Frohna



FROM OUR AUDIENCES

ORSA IBERNATA

“Haunting in the most stunning and gorgeous ways. Will be watching it again tomorrow.”

IN THE CLOUD

“Anyone who has lived through this pandemic and isolation can truly relate to how the characters were feeling!”

“I have felt every emotion in this performance!”

“This was a story I will never forget...”

THE SOUND

“One of the most delightful experiences of my life. My heart is so full right now.”

EXPANSE

“Wow!! I still have goosebumps.”



Orsa ibernata, Pictured: Elizabeth Blood,
Photo Credit: Christal Wagner



FROM OUR ARTISTS

IN THE CLOUD

“One of the most satisfying artistic ventures of my career.” — *Norman Moses, “Dad”*

“A moment that meant so much to me.” — *Marilyn White, “Mom”*

THE SOUND

“I feel blessed to know and work with y’all and to have meaningful work to do. It’s absolutely affirming!”

— *Monique Ross, SistaStrings*

EXPANSE

“I was struggling to break out of a lot of creative boxes before hopping onto this piece. I can confidently say that I’m no longer in that place.” — *Baine Avent, Director*

L’ORFEO

“You have the ability to make performing fun, relaxed, and unique all at once.” — *Nicole McCarty, “Apollo”*

VOICE LAB

“I leave every Voice Lab feeling renewed and inspired and with a desire to keep working harder.” — *Autumn Schacherl*

“Thank you so much for the generous and supportive space you created tonight. It was a wonderful (virtual) place to sing and listen.” — *Amanda Wyand*

“Thank you for having me at Voice Lab! I’m looking forward to coming back for many more!” — *Ariel Downs*



Enchanted Park(ing Lot), Pictured: Emanuel Camacho,
Photo Credit: Mark Frohna