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The Impresario

Evans Mirageas begins his first season as Cincinnati Opera's artistic director

Interview By [Anne Arenstein](#)

There's more than the usual buzz about Cincinnati Opera's new season. It goes beyond speculation about diva Aprile Millo, who sings the title role of *Tosca*, and the usual sniping about which version of *Tales of Hoffman* should be performed. Cincinnati Opera Artistic Director Evans Mirageas is a hot topic himself.

It's his first full-time position as an artistic director, but artistic management has been on his resume since the early 1980s, when Chicago's Classical music station WFMT hired Mirageas to produce an internationally broadcast live performance of Sir Georg Solti's only appearance at the Bayreuth Festival. As the studio producer for Lyric Opera of Chicago's syndicated broadcasts, Mirageas watched as legendary Artistic Director Ardis Krainik mounted productions.

The experience honed his budding producer's skills.

"I was a privileged observer, since I would hang out backstage, watching the rehearsal process," he says. "I saw for myself how a successful opera company works."

Impressed with his operatic knowledge, Seiji Ozawa hired Mirageas as artistic administrator for the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1989. Ozawa's staged versions of opera at concerts both in Boston and at the Tanglewood Festival were highly acclaimed.

Five years later, Mirageas moved to London to take over as senior vice president for artists and repertoire at Decca Records. It was an opera house only lacking a stage, and Mirageas was its impresario. During his seven-year tenure he produced over 40 recordings of opera whose casts included Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, Renee Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli, Bryn Terfel and Thomas Hampson.

Among his successful contract negotiations were those for Renee Fleming ("Her first and only contract") and Romanian soprano Angela Gheorghiu ("She's gone to EMI but we signed her to her first major contract"). It's hardly surprising that more than one Cincinnati Opera board member's comment about Mirageas is an awed "He knows *everyone*."

Mirageas left Decca in 2000 to become a freelance administrator, focusing on orchestras and conductors, "but I told Marc Scorca, the executive director of Opera America, to remember that I know as much about opera as I do about symphony orchestras," he says.

Four years later, when Cincinnati Opera CEO Patty Beggs contacted Scorca for assistance in finding an interim director, he recommended Mirageas. Initially, Mirageas was hired to oversee casting for the 2005 and 2006 seasons, but it wasn't long before a serious courtship began.

Beggs, known for her acuity and skillful guidance of Cincinnati Opera management, proved to be a crucial factor in Mirageas' decision to move from interim to full-time.

"Patty and the staff she has assembled were the main reasons for coming here," he says. Another factor was Cincinnati Opera's board, long acknowledged as one of the most effective arts boards in the city.

Mirageas agrees. "I've not yet heard a board member tell me, 'You know, you really should be...' They set

policy, they follow the principles of governance and they are wonderfully supportive."

This might be Mirageas' first season as artistic director, but his casting direction was a force in last year's successful season, one that included the premier of *Margaret Garner*. This year's opening night will have more than its usual share of excitement.

Tosca is as much a role model as a role for Aprile Millo, who sings the part. Millo's turbulent career is on an upswing, and if you're looking for a diva in action, get your *Tosca* tickets now.

"She's a magnificent singing actress and *Tosca* is her all-time favorite role," says Mirageas. "She's an opera singer down to her toes, and I know she'll give 150 percent to every performance."

Thanks to Mirageas' encyclopedic knowledge of musicians and his connections in the music world, *Tosca* has a leading man. When the originally signed tenor got a better offer, Mirageas found a tape of an Italian tenor named Antonello Palombi. "He only sang briefly, but I said, 'Wait a minute! This guy's amazing!'"

Speight Jenkins of the Seattle Opera and other artist managers backed up Mirageas' opinion. "He hasn't sung much here, but he's definitely on the rise," says Mirageas.

Veteran performer Tom Hammons, a Cincinnati Opera favorite, also returns in *Tosca* as the Sacristan. Other performers to look for are mezzo-soprano Carmella Jones, soprano Sarah Coburn and tenor Richard Margison, all featured in the production of Verdi's *A Masked Ball* later this season.

"Carmella has the potential to have an enormous career and she has graciously agreed to do a special concert with tenor Vinson Cole at Allen Temple later this month," Mirageas says. "We're lucky to have Sarah -- she's skyrocketing and she's here for two operas, as is Carmella. Richard Margison sings with such heart and such feeling."

The season's big departure is Emmanuel Chabrier's *L'Étoile*, a frothy confection about star-struck lovers and star-crossed predictions. The New York City Opera's production garnered critical and audience raves last year and, Mirageas is confident that Cincinnati audiences will continue to embrace new works as well as new productions.

"We conducted focus groups last fall and participants told us that they want to hear new works," he says. "Not often, but, yes, they still want to hear them. There is a great thirst for great opera and a curiosity about the new."

"For over half our audiences, this is their one live opera experience. This season -- and future seasons -- will show how well we balance tradition, new productions and new technologies."

TOSCA, presented by Cincinnati Opera, opens Thursday and continues Saturday and June 23 at Music Hall.

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