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A day of an artistic director Opera's Evans Mirageas is a busy man

BY JANELLE GELFAND | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Midway through Cincinnati Opera's summer festival, Evans Mirageas, 51, in his first season as artistic director, is deep into the behind-the-scenes challenges of putting on four operas. With two down - "Tosca" and "L'Etoile" - and two to go - "A Masked Ball" and "The Tales of Hoffmann" - much of what he does, he says, "is like piecing together a massive jigsaw puzzle."

Monday night, he was at "Opera Goes to Church," a concert featuring opera cast members at Allen Temple AME Church in Bond Hill. More than 1,200 people turned out.

On Tuesday, his day began at 6 a.m. and ended at an evening Reds game at Great American Ball Park, where opera singer Carmella Jones sang the national anthem. His day:

6 a.m. - On the phone at home. "From 6 to 8 a.m., I look after clients in Europe (he is also an independent artist consultant). By 8, I'm ready to rock 'n' roll."

8:15 a.m. - His table is set with juice, coffee and warm, freshly baked (by Mirageas) muffins. He loves to cook and entertain in his airy, two-bedroom downtown loft apartment, completely furnished by IKEA. Recently, he cooked for four cast members of "L'Etoile" who couldn't find a restaurant open after a rehearsal; his family, which came to "Tosca"; and opera diva Aprile Millo.

9 a.m. - A private meeting at Music Hall with the stage directors of the upcoming two operas, to hammer out schedule conflicts. His hardest task: Finding free time to allow the singers to attend the Reds game. Solution: An evening rehearsal is scratched.

10 a.m. - A "meet-and-greet" with the "Tales of Hoffmann" cast, most of whom have just arrived from Paris, Vienna and New York. Mirageas schmoozes with singers, cast members, trustees, guild members and staff. It's a first welcome, with formal introductions and lots of air-kissing.

11 a.m. - Mirageas jumps into his car - a Kia, provided by the company - to check in on a rehearsal of "A Masked Ball" up the street in Cincinnati Ballet offices. "I'm having the time of my life, and I make the important decisions, too," he says, while driving. In his CD changer: "The Best of Chicago," a reminder of when he was awakened each day as a camper by Chicago blaring from loudspeakers at Interlochen (Mich.) Music Camp.

12:05 p.m. - Back at Music Hall, there's a "Tales of Hoffmann" meeting led by Glenn Plott, director of production. Present are the stage director, scenic and lighting designers, and directors of costumes, wigs and makeup, props, and others. Director Mark Streshinsky asks to see the gun catalog. The last gun they used was collapsible and wouldn't stop flapping when drawn, he says. Mirageas asks if the gun can be built so it turns red hot. Plott promises to look into it.

12:45 p.m. - Mirageas disappears into his office for an impromptu meeting with tenor Antonello Palombi, who sang Cavaradossi in "Tosca." They are discussing "what we can do in the future."

1:20 p.m. - Lunch at his desk includes cold chicken from Findlay Market, his favorite place to go Saturday mornings.

1:30 p.m. - Mirageas power-walks through the scene shop, out the back door and across Central Parkway to the WVXU-WGUC offices, to tape a spot for "Around Cincinnati."

2:30 p.m. - He sits in on a first reading at Music Hall with the cast of "Tales of Hoffmann," led by maestro Emmanuel Plasson. When French baritone Philippe Rouillon (the Four Villains) begins to sing, Mirageas beams. It's partly out of relief: Rouillon is stepping in for James Morris, who is having knee surgery. Rouillon, he says, is "the real article. Baritones like that don't grow on trees."

4 p.m. - Works out at the YMCA.

6:30 p.m. - Cincinnati Opera's Jones is singing the national anthem at the Reds-Royals game. Mirageas accompanies her to home plate for her big moment. It's his first Reds game, and he's elated. He downs two hot dogs.

"It's so much fun, because it's somebody else's show," he says, looking relaxed.

Later, he goes to greet other cast members who are guests of arts patron Louise Nippert, a minority owner of the Reds, in her box.

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