

Bold move by orchestra

THE ONLY FULL-TIME PROFESSIONAL chamber music orchestra in the US, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (SPCO) has made the decision to eliminate the position of music director.

Instead, its musicians will take on the responsibilities with the help of five artistic partners: violinist Joshua Bell, conductors Roberto Abbado, Nicholas McGegan and Douglas Boyd, and pianist Stephen Prutsman.

The idea of working as a collective in this way is largely unheard of in the American orchestra world, but is more common in Europe. 'We have taken the best of a number of systems, especially from the UK and Europe and amalgamated that into something that will work for us,' explains Bruce Coppock, president and managing director of the SPCO.

Inspiration has come from organisations such as the Vienna Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. 'The most striking example of this model is the Vienna Philharmonic, where musicians direct virtually every aspect of the orchestra's artistic life and where podium leadership constitutes conductors with whom the orchestra feels a special affinity,' says Coppock.

Under this new leadership model, which will start in the 2004/05 season, the decision-making will be taken by two committees dealing with artistic vision and artistic personnel respectively. Each committee will comprise of three musicians and two management personnel. The artistic vision committee will deal with touring, recording, programming and selection of guest

artist and conductors, while the artistic personnel committee will deal with personnel issues and auditions, among other things.

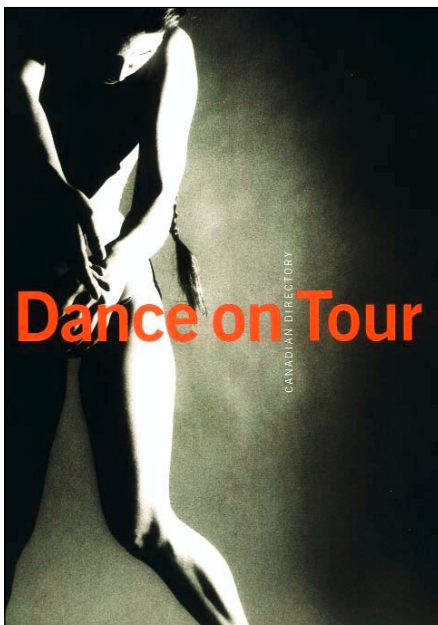
But introducing this new model has not been without its problems. Coppock admits there have been frustrations, anxiety and even some divisions within the orchestra as a result. For orchestra management, the way of working will change enormously. 'We can no longer just decide like we used to,' he explains.

But what led the orchestra to take this big leap? Money may be one factor – SPCO recently posted its first annual deficit in a decade and in May last year it introduced a \$1.85m cost-cutting measure which included a reduction in musicians' salaries, elimination of 11 administrative staff and a cut in compensation for executive management. But Coppock denies that. 'Finances have not really driven any of this,' he says. 'It came from a desire to craft a distinctive artistic profile.'

One challenge for the orchestra is that the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St Paul) have two full-time orchestras, the other one being the successful Minnesota Orchestra. Therefore, the SPCO has felt a need to profile itself more strongly and show that it is distinctly different from a symphony orchestra.

Another reason is one person cannot be expert in the entire repertoire the orchestra covers – baroque, classical and contemporary. Working with artistic partners will address that and also has an added bonus: there will never be a sudden leadership transition issue. EJ

New dance directory for Canada



A new directory of Canadian dance companies available for international touring has recently been launched. Specifically targeted to international dance promoters, festival directors and venue managers, the companies and artists featured were selected based on their previous touring experience and their availability to perform internationally, particularly in Europe and Asia.

The publication, *Dance on Tour*, was put together by the dance section at the Canada Council for the Arts. The 42 artists and ensembles featured will all be available for touring in the next 12-18 months and include both the relatively unknown and famous companies such as the National Ballet of Canada, Compagnie Marie Chouinard and O Vertigo Danse Inc.

Information from the directory will also be available online at www.canadiandanceontour.ca along with video footage of most of the artists featured. For a free print copy email sandra.bender@canadacouncil.ca

News in brief

- US visa red tape has prevented a Russian soprano from playing the lead role of Cleopatra in Handel's *Julius Caesar* at the **Pittsburgh Opera**. Citizenship and Immigration Services told Alexandrina Pendatchanska they had made a mistake in processing her application, but it was too late for her to reapply in time for the performances.

- Ireland's **National Concert Hall** has reported that 2003 was one of the busiest years in its history. Ticket revenue for the year reached €4.7m, with the hall staging almost 400 events. Director Judith Woodworth put the success partly down to the venue's efforts to broaden its audience base.

- The **Mariinsky Opera** has withdrawn from Russia's Golden Mask Festival because of its hectic touring and rehearsal schedule. The decision means artists from the company nominated for awards at the Moscow festival will not be present at the ceremony. The company said it could not participate without compromising its obligations abroad.

- The Scottish Arts Council has announced a £7.2m increase in funding for arts projects over the next two years. Among those to benefit will be the **National Theatre of Scotland** in Glasgow, **Royal Scottish National Orchestra**, **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** and **Scottish Ballet**. The Youth Music Initiative, which provides young school children with free music lessons, will also benefit.

- San Francisco's **Women's Philharmonic** will play its final concert this month. The orchestra, which was created to honour female composers and conductors, has been largely inactive for the last few years. It is in talks with the American Symphony Orchestras League about transferring some of its more successful programmes.

- The **Association of Japanese Symphony Orchestras** is refusing to pay royalties after a sudden increase in rates. The association has refused to pay the Japanese Society for Rights of Authors, Composers and Publishers (JASRAC) since fees for music performed during concerts were raised in October last year. Under the new system, royalties are decided according to the seating capacity and admissions charges of the venue.

- The **Opera Company of Brooklyn** has reached an agreement with the American Federation of Musicians banning the use of computerised 'virtual orchestras' at its performances. Under the agreement, the company will use live musicians for all its performances instead of the technology it has previously used to replace them.

Double vision

The Sydney Theatre Company's Rob Brookman tells Jeremy Eccles why artistic experience is just as important as good business sense

THIS PLACE IS EXTRAORDINARY. People visit from all over the world and express awe and deep, deep jealousy about our circumstances. The magic of this place is intense – to have rehearsal, manufacturing, admin and performance spaces all married, mainly on a wharf sticking 200 metres out into the harbour in one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

These are the words of Rob Brookman who is clearly very happy that artistic director and CEO Robyn Nevin head-hunted him almost five years ago to be general manager of the Sydney Theatre Company (STC). However, at the time, after 12 years in administration at the Adelaide Festival Centre, Brookman thought he had moved on from such desk work, by directing both the Adelaide and Wellington Festivals and then setting up Arts Projects Australia, a mainly importing production company.

'But there was also a voice in my head which reminded me that at university I'd dreamed of being part of a producing theatre company, making

rather than just presenting or selecting,' he explains.

This year the STC will offer 12 productions to its 23,000 subscribers in three venues – their own Wharf Theatre, the new Sydney Theatre and the SOH Drama Theatre. The budget is AS\$21m, employing 73 administrative staff and 10 artistic; and there are 42 corporate sponsors plus donations from seven foundations.

But the big drama in 2004 is that the commercial dockside development around the STC threw up an opportunity to build a theatre. The result is an 850-seat venue, the Sydney Theatre (ST), which the STC is programming and managing. It opened in January, justifying the addition of two senior staff to run development and touring across the whole company, plus technical staff of its own. The ST now takes up 25 per cent of Brookman's time.

'My biggest problem is changing an organisational culture now that we have to satisfy our clients as well as ourselves. But it helps that we're curating rather than just hiring to anyone prepared to pay a deposit. Our audiences must have confidence in coming there.' So there will not be any commercial musicals or *Puppetry of the Penis*-type shows.

In 2004, clients who rented space include the Abbey Theatre, Shared Experience, Compagnie Philippe Genty, Duncan C Weldon and the Australian Ballet. Cheek by Jowl's *Othello* will be one of four plays forming part of the STC subscription season in the ST. As a result, there is a reduced presence in the Opera House Drama Theatre. 'But we'll never leave there,' insists Brookman. 'It's part of our 25-year history.'

But that short history has seen major change. What was founded as a state theatre company in 1979, primarily to fill the SOH venue, with almost 50 per

cent of its income in subsidy to achieve set community/artistic goals, is now only 7.5 per cent government funded. 'As a result, we can't be insulated from the business of finding very substantial audiences and very substantial corporate support,' admits the general manager. 'But that said, we still have a serious responsibility to the community – not necessarily drawing the most people but balancing our cultural views with the size of audience we want to see any show. So we simply pick the right theatre and length of run, and marshal appropriate resources.'

But is this the sort of decision-taking that is best done by a financial specialist – as has happened with the recent appointment of non-arts business people to manage the Sydney Opera House and Sydney Symphony Orchestra? 'I don't see that being able to add up and marshal physical, human and financial resources is mutually exclusive from understanding the creative impulses that make terrific art,' says Brookman. 'In fact, I find it very alarming that there's a tendency to think that people trained purely in business must be better equipped to run the business side of the arts. Like footballers, we need to be "both sided."'

'Luckily,' Brookman concludes, 'the STC is probably as stable as it's ever been – with surpluses of about AS\$250,000 in the past two years and a reserve of AS\$3m built up. That's almost enough to give us three years' comfort – it's so easy to run up a million dollar deficit – it's only a five per cent variation, nothing to be frightened about. In fact, the hardest thing for a non-profit organisation is to break even; it's like trying to land a jumbo jet on a tennis court.' **IAM**

For more information visit www.sydneytheatre.com.au

Photo: Grant Carroll



Brookman was attracted by the opportunity to produce theatre

artist manager

Star treatment

With offices in France and Germany, Germinal Hilbert has managed the crème of the opera world for 30 years, writes Susan Shineberg

IN THE CUT-THROAT BUSINESS that modern artist management has become, Germinal Hilbert is one of the enduring success stories. With twin bases in Munich and Paris (Hilbert has dual nationality) he can look back on 30 years of fruitful operation nurturing star talent. Concentrating almost exclusively on conductors and singers, he boasts among his current stable a veritable *Who's Who* of the opera stage: Deborah Voigt, Roberto Alagna and Wolfgang Sawallisch, to name a few.

'We've always had a lot of very important artists,' says Hilbert. 'Right at the very beginning I had German management of conductor Karl Böhm, one of the leading conductors of the time, one of the greatest sopranos, Birgit Nilsson, and Leonie Rysanek. I think I always had a kind of feeling about who could become a good singer. For example, I took over a very young, unknown singer, and developed her career. It was Jessye Norman.'

Born in Bayreuth, Hilbert began professional life practising law in Germany, but always harboured a passion for music. He set up shop as an arts manager in Paris in 1973 after deciding to live in France, but unwilling to do the necessary additional three years of study to practice French law. In 1976 he opened a second office in Munich to allow him to cover the lucrative German market. Hilbert now has a total staff of 11 and concentrates on the opera market, which he says has more cachet and brings the higher-profile, better paying engagements.

The secret of good management, Hilbert thinks, lies in the careful pacing of your clients, particularly singers, which is clearly his passion. Bad management can lead to the untimely destruction of a voice. 'I'm very careful with my artists. If you're an instrumentalist you can always buy



Hilbert began professional life as a lawyer

another violin or piano. But if a voice is broken, then it's finished forever. A lot of managers – not naming any names – are not very responsible in this regard. They push their clients into dramatic repertoire much too early, before they are vocally or mentally ready for today's opera world, where they are expected to be actors too. American managers can be especially ruthless, but it happens with some European colleagues too,' he says.

A good example of a well-managed career is that of Lucia Popp, whose

'A lot of managers push their clients into dramatic repertoire before they are ready'

range he built up from a light coloratura, through the lighter Mozart repertoire, then to *Rosencavalier*. By the end of her career she was singing Beethoven and Wagner, a fully-fledged dramatic soprano. 'She sang until she died,' says Hilbert. 'My philosophy is that a singer who has a normal career plan should sing at least 30 years.'

Aside from having a nose for good artists, Hilbert says the other vital ingredient of quality management is the personal touch – getting on a plane

and criss-crossing the globe to visit opera houses and concert organisations in person. 'If you call and ask what's happening in 2006 or 2007, you get very vague answers or mostly nothing. You have to go and sit with the people and ask what they are doing, then recommend your artists. They don't always take what I suggest, but at least I have the chance to suggest, because I know what's going on.'

Management today is very expensive, says Hilbert. 'I go two or three times a year to America and once or twice to Japan. I'm travelling all the time in Europe. If you only have a handful of artists and a small staff it is not easy. The competition is fierce now.'

At the risk of sounding gloomy, Hilbert adds that times are tough for artist managers. 'Only the top management will continue, I think,' he says. 'When I started there were five opera managers in Germany. Now there are 150, but I think it's the same five who are getting the bulk of the work.'

Is he still discovering wonderful artists? 'Not so many,' smiles Hilbert. 'You don't discover ten every year, but at least one or two.' One example of a new star in the making is 25-year-old Spanish mezzo Maite Beaumont, for whom he predicts great things. 'She's based at Hamburg Opera at the moment and is starting now to do more important things, for example, she has an engagement at the Chicago Lyric Theatre in the 2005/06 season.'

The lawyer turned impresario says he still finds the work enjoyable after all this time. 'It's often very tiring. You have to be everywhere and it's very stressful, jumping from one plane to another. But even after 30 years I'm still as enthusiastic as I was on the first day.' **IAM**

For more information visit www.hilbert.de