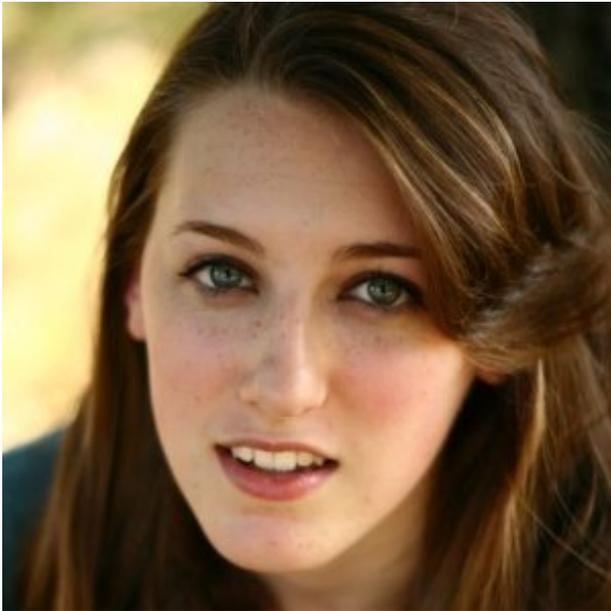


Cleveland Opera Theater's Lisa Yanofsky discusses educational and outreach programs

by Mike Telin



On Friday, May 8 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, May 10 at 3:00 pm at the Cleveland Performing Arts Center (formerly Masonic Auditorium), Cleveland Opera Theater will present Puccini's *Tosca*. Performed with full orchestra, chorus, and costumes, the production will feature sets designed by renowned Cleveland architect Richard Fleischman.

In a recent telephone conversation with COT's education and outreach director Lisa Yanofsky, I asked her to talk about the educational activities the company has planned for the production. She began by telling me about the

youth chorus that will be part of the production.

Lisa Yanofsky: There are 15 students in the youth chorus who attend the University of Cleveland Preparatory School, which is one of the I-Can charter schools. It's located right behind Masonic Hall so it's very convenient. They can walk to the rehearsals. It's quite a range in ages from first grade through seventh. They attend all of the chorus rehearsals and receive coachings on the staging, the music, and diction. They're enjoying working with our chorus master, Timothy Little, our stage director, Scott Skiba, and our music director, Domenico Boyagian.

We're excited to be in the Masonic. I think it's a great introduction for the kids to see such a large venue and to see opera in a more traditional setting.

Mike Telin: *Who made the connection between COT and the I-Can school?*

LY: One of our board members, Marci Alegant, helped us make the connection. This is our first project with the I-Can schools, and it's something we're very excited about.

MT: I understand you're working with some area high school students as well.

LY: That's right, we're working with students from Cuyahoga Falls High School. We're going to the school on two different mornings to give them an introduction to opera. Tim Culver will perform and Scott Skiba will talk about what it's like to be the director. And they'll all be attending the Friday night performance, so 150 freshmen will see the show and get a backstage tour.

MT: You also have an exciting project with Ideastream.

LY: Yes, there will be a distance learning workshop at 11:00 am on Friday, May 1, the first thirty minutes of which will be a performance.

MT: What will the workshop entail?

LY: There will be more singing, and then we'll talk about everything from *Tosca* to what it's like to be an opera singer. We'll also be answering students' questions. It's a video chat, so they'll see us and we'll see them.

There are over 30 schools from all around the country, as far away as Alaska, that subscribe to the distance learning series. It's difficult to predict how many will be there in real time, but everything will be recorded and made available to all of the subscribing schools. Distance learning is something COT would like to be able to continue in the future, although it is quite costly.

MT: Will there be any pre-concert talks prior to the Friday and Sunday performances?

LY: Yes, I will be leading Opera 101 workshops one hour before each performance. I'll talk about the opera and what people will see. I'll make everyone mini-experts before going in. It will be fun and interactive. It's a good way to help people feel engaged when they're watching.

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