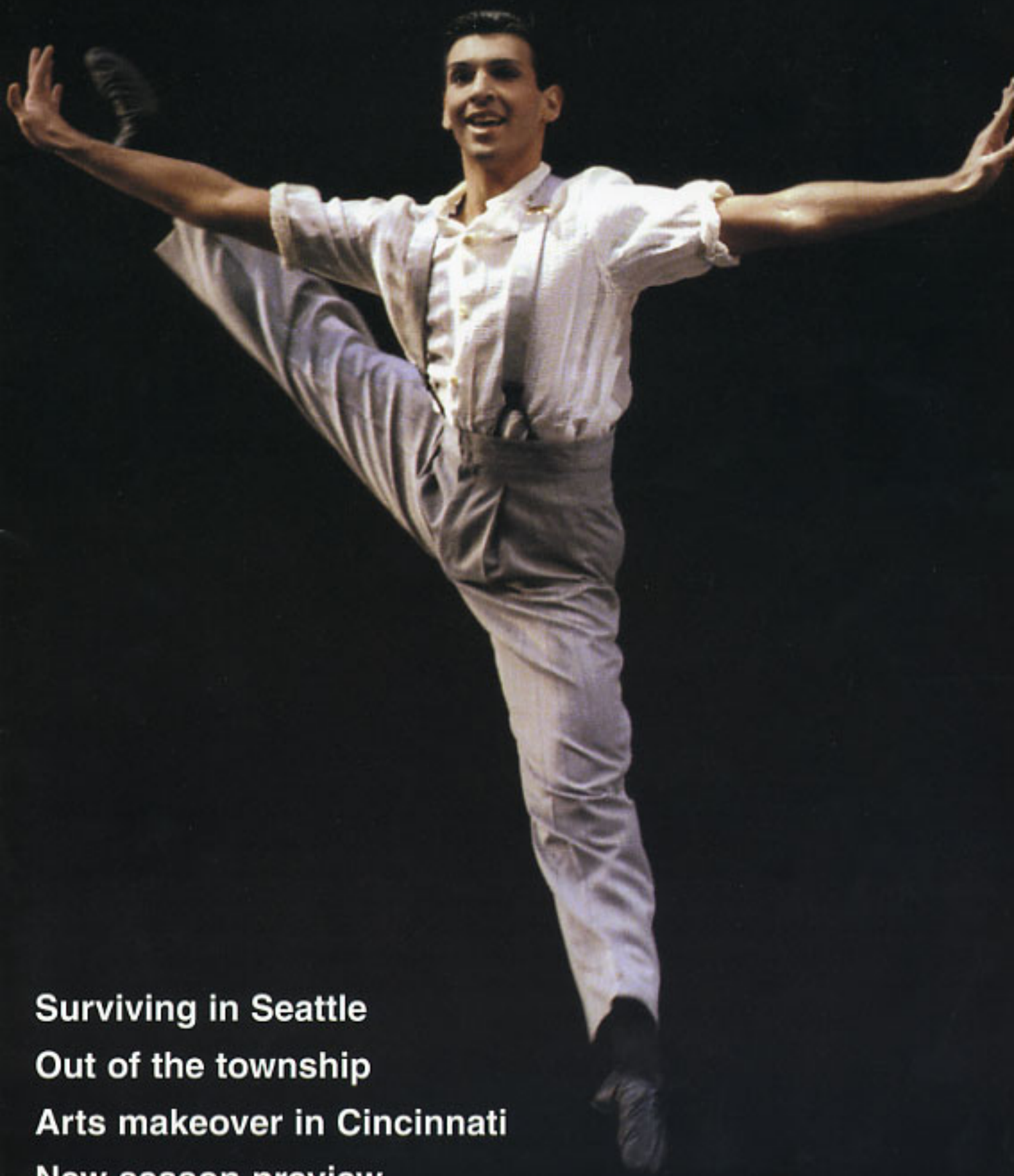


# International Arts Manager

*The business magazine for the performing arts*

September 2002



**Surviving in Seattle**

**Out of the township**

**Arts makeover in Cincinnati**

**New season preview**

## Cincinnati

# Moving with the times

**Cincinnati is on the brink of international cultural recognition. Paul Cutts visits a city coming to terms with its new-found status**

**S**TANDING ON THE NORTHERN banks of the Ohio river, Cincinnati boasts the largest concert hall in the US and the country's second oldest opera company. It is also home to a nationally respected ballet troupe, a symphony orchestra counting such greats as Leopold Stokowski and Fritz Reiner among its former music directors and has the oldest choral gathering - the Cincinnati May Festival - in the western hemisphere.

Yet for a place that is ranked in the top ten most attractive areas to live in the US by Fortune magazine (Winston Churchill called it America's most beautiful inland city), Cincinnati maintains a peculiarly low profile. Overshadowed for decades by its brasher Ohio neighbour, Cleveland, Cincinnati has developed an almost puritanical reluctance to shout about itself - in large part, a psychological legacy of the city's serious-minded German founding fathers. But the balance of cultural power in the region is shifting as a combination of strong artistic leadership, dynamic programming, venue rebuilds and engaged audiences are reconfiguring Cincinnati's artistic landscape.

'We often hear that Cincinnati has a small-town mentality,' concurs Maureen Dillon, a member of the Cincinnati Opera board and a committed arts advocate in the city. 'But that can be very positive as well as negative. There is a good relationship between the artistic directors here and with that sort of cultural co-operation and collaboration you can really move a community forward.' The community, moreover, is very involved. 'We have enormous volunteerism and very engaged boards,' says Dillon.

Nic Muni, artistic director of Cincinnati Opera since the mid 1990s, and widely respected for his creative vision, agrees. 'Cincinnati has an inferi-

ority complex, yet there is a deep sense of civic and cultural pride in the city and the corporate community,' says Muni, a native of New Jersey. There is also a long tradition of supporting the arts here. It is a sophisticated town in terms of the cultural mood.'

Muni has been surprised at the dynamism of the last few years. 'If I look back on where the community was when I arrived, it has really zoomed forward,' he comments. 'At the time there was nothing special going on. The energy was really started by the theatre scene, particularly the Cincinnati Playhouse and the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival, and museums; everyone has benefited from that initial spurt.'

Geographically, Cincinnati is well placed to capitalise on this artistic initiative. Nestling in the extreme southwest corner of Ohio, the city is effectively the capital of the 'tri-state' area (Kentucky and Indiana are both a short drive away). It is the US hub for Delta Airlines, making it a major transit point for international tourists and business travellers alike. The city's arts organisations have also been historically well supported by corporate America, thanks in large part to the fact that pharmaceuticals giant Procter & Gamble has its headquarters in the city.

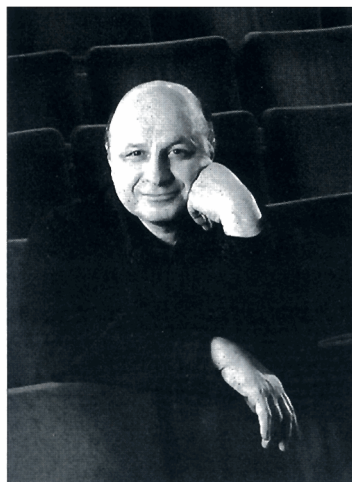
If Procter & Gamble come on board as sponsors,' comments one cultural executive in the city, 'their stamp of approval will encourage others to give, too. Nobody wants to be seen to be ignoring the arts if the biggest firm in town is involved.'

The arts also benefit from the Fine Arts Fund (FAF). The third largest arts fundraising body in the US, FAF has generated an astonishing \$9m this year in private donations to the 'big eight' groups in town, including the opera, symphony, ballet, Playhouse and assorted museums and galleries. The

opera alone was given \$900,000 by the Fund, around 15 per cent of its entire annual operating budget.

Becoming a private arts benefactor is a strong part of local tradition and is actively encouraged among the upper echelons of Cincinnati society. But nor are they averse to boldness: a new home for the city's Contemporary Arts Center - currently under construction and funded in part by generous private gifts - has been designed by avant-garde architect Zaha Hadid, whose radical plans for a new opera house in Cardiff were very publicly abandoned in the 1990s.

Local husband and wife teams Cathy and Tom Crain and Harry and Linda Fath underwrote the Opera's new production of Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*, a highly risky venture given the nature of its subject matter in a state where capital punishment is well supported. Older patrons such as Patricia Corbett have given millions (often anonymously) to support cultural ventures in the city, including substantial contributions to the \$93m construction and renovation project of the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati. In February



Nic Muni has striven to include more contemporary works in the opera's repertoire

Photo: Alan Brown



this year, the Corbett Foundation granted a further \$1.5m to Cincinnati Opera for the creation of new administrative and rehearsal spaces at Music Hall, the home it shares with its in-house band the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (CSO).

Such financial enthusiasm has encouraged Muni to push his company's artistic boundaries. The summer 2002 season saw two company premieres - *Dead Man Walking* and Strauss' *Elektra* - alongside Gounod's *Romeo et Juliette* and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*.

'*Dead Man Walking* and *Elektra* are real indications of how open the audience has become,' Muni insists. For an audience at a traditional opera company that is 81 years old, and in a conservative mid-western town, to react the way it did is very encouraging. They have stayed with us on our artistic journey. We're heading towards *Wozzeck*,' he smiles.

Such artistic journeying has also been part of Jasson Minadakis' mission as artistic director of the Cincinnati Shakespeare Festival (CFS). With an annual operating budget of \$820,000 he manages to put on between nine and 13 main-stage theatrical productions a

year, of which 45 per cent are new or recent works. The strategy is paying dividends: last year attendance at the year-round theatre averaged 98 per cent, while almost two-thirds of the CSF audience were under 45 years of age.

'Now that we are financially healthy,' Minadakis explains, 'we are expanding the new work mix. Because we are the smallest theatre in town we can change our programming relatively easily. But we also have a travelling show that reaches 18,000 kids over the course of a year.'

But broader community outreach work has become of pressing importance for cultural groups in Cincinnati in the wake of recent social turbulence. Almost half of Cincinnati's 400,000 inner city population is of African American origin. Two years ago the city was flung into the national spotlight when the shooting of an unarmed black man by local police triggered days of rioting in the depressed area of town known as Over the Rhine, right on Music Hall's doorstep.

Janelle Gelfand, arts critic of the influential Cincinnati Enquirer for a decade, has been a vociferous critic of arts organisations' failure to embrace the broader community. A full year before the riots, she used one of her

Sunday columns to attack the social inclusion record of the CSO.

'This has always been a very conservative city and that goes for people who sit on its arts boards, too,' Gelfand says. 'I wrote a piece about diversity in the symphony, which is based in the heart of the black neighbourhood, when it appointed its third African-American musician in its 105-year history. Although the CSO formed a multicultural awareness council more than a decade ago, it is still a largely white picture.'

But she is not critical of every arts organisation. 'The opera's board has been much more visionary,' Gelfand argues, 'and has taken a more active interest. Nic Muni's vision has been to give the company much more of a national profile and presence and that has included strong outreach work.'

Gelfand acknowledges that the problem of inclusion is a national as much as a local issue. But she does detect a refreshing wind of change blowing through the orchestra with the appointment of Paavo Järvi as its music director from last season.

'Järvi has great initiative,' Gelfand enthuses. 'When he first arrived here he went straight to the university to

Richard Strauss' *Elektra* (with Deborah Polaski and Robert Hale) is the sort of opera Cincinnati audiences have not been used to



Photo: Philip Groshong

## AGENCY

### represents

#### Orchestras:

Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra  
(chief **conductor** Yiri Simonov)  
The State Symphony **Capella** of Russia  
(chief conductor Valery Polyansky)  
Symphony Orchestra of the Bolshoi Theatre  
(conductor Mark **Ermler**)\*  
Symphony Orchestra "Russian Philharmony"  
(music director and conductor Alexander **Vedernikov**)\*\*

#### Chorus

State Symphony **Capella** of Russia  
(chief **Conductor** Valery Polyansky)

#### Chamber music

Chamber **Orchestra** "Musica Viva"  
(music director Alexandra Rudin)  
Dumunant **Sulung** Quartet  
Romantic Piano Trio

#### Ballet companies

Moscow City Ballet  
(artistic **director** Victor Smirnov-Golovanov)  
Russian National **Ballet Theatre**  
(artistic **director** Vladimir Moisseev)

#### Conductors

Mark Ennler  
Valery Polyansky  
Vladimir **Ziva**  
Pavel Klinichev

#### Violin

Maxim Fedotov  
Julia Krasko  
Sergei **Azizian**\*\*\*

#### Cello

Alexandre Rudin  
Boris Andrianov

#### Piano

Nikolai Petrov  
Natalia **Troull**  
Andrei Diev  
Alexandre Guiridin  
Vadim Rudenko  
Svotlana Navasardian

\*for UK only

\*\*for Japan

\*\*\*except Scandinavian countries and Holland

encourage students and young people to come to the symphony. You could almost immediately tell the difference in the make-up of the audiences at Music Hall,' which **Gelfand** says have become younger and more ethnically diverse.

Meanwhile **Patricia Beggs**, managing director of Cincinnati Opera, regards Cincinnati's image as a microcosm of America's social ills a source of genuine pain. 'I think Cincinnatians **are** devastated by the city's current national profile as conservative and intolerant,' she states. 'It began back in 1990 when an exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe pictures led to the director of the local art gallery being prosecuted for obscenity. It was just so embarrassing. With the riots, too, there was a sense that this could not be happening in our city.'

Nevertheless **things** did begin to change. 'After the riots, there seemed to be a recognition on the part of city leaders that something had to be done,'

**Beggs** continues. 'Their approach was first to build new ballparks (Cincinnati has the oldest professional baseball team in the US) and to encourage new retail business into town, but there has also been a consensus about the role of the arts. We **are** not one of the local 'gazelle cities' that is leaping ahead in terms of bringing in communities and growing the economic base. Cities such as Charlotte and Indianapolis are outstripping us. But there is a growing recognition of how important the arts can be as an enticement and economic generator.'

The arts can be used to heal wider rifts, too. One example is the siting in Cincinnati of the National Underground Railroad Museum, which commemorates the clandestine escape route used by fugitive slaves before emancipation. Due to open in 2005 it will celebrate the city's role in the anti-slavery movement and hopefully send out an important signal about its modern-day aspirations. **IAM**

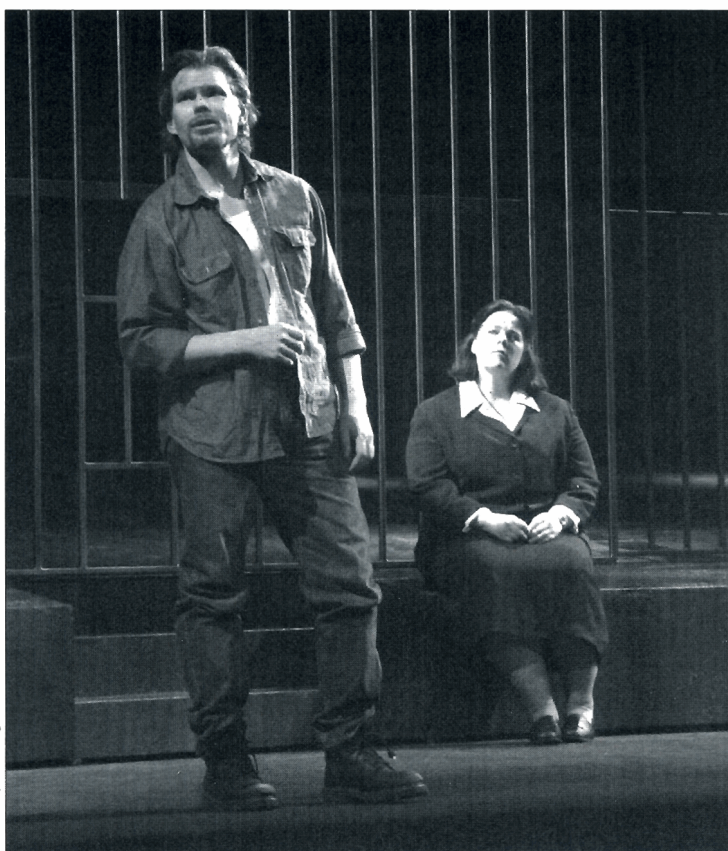


Photo: Philip Gresham

**Dead Man Walking** (with John Packard and Margaret Jane Wray) was acutely relevant to wider concerns

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