

CREAM CITY

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Inspiration Central

MKE's thriving performing arts scene kicks off its 2022-23 season this month, and this year we profiled a baker's dozen of our amazing artists — dancers, musicians, actors, vocalists, directors and visionaries. Our coverage begins on pg. 45. (Pictured here is Jill Anna Ponasik, Milwaukee Opera Theatre's producing artistic director, who'll be directing an updated, gender-conscious adaptation of Mozart's musical take on romantic fidelity, "Cosi Fan Tutte," at the Florentine Opera.) On the next page, find what's new in men's and women's fashion in Milwaukee from our local experts. The compelling story of two families bonding over an organ donation begins on pg. 20, and on pg. 26 learn how a high-school class in financial literacy led one student to run two businesses.

Photo by Laura Dierbeck





Jill Anna Ponasik was photographed at the Florentine Opera in the Riverwest neighborhood. Photo by Laura Dierbeck.

Jill Anna Ponasik

artistic director

Jill Anna Ponasik, now in her 13th season as Milwaukee Opera Theatre’s producing artistic director, has developed musical productions for most of Milwaukee’s professional theatre companies. This season at the Florentine Opera, she’ll direct an updated, gender-conscious adaptation of Mozart’s musical take on romantic fidelity, “Cosi Fan Tutte.”

What drew you to this adaption of Mozart’s classic?

It was developed in 2020 for the Glimmerglass Festival by two of the brightest, boldest creators in our opera environment today, Kelley Rourke and Eric Einhorn. Because of the pandemic, it was never produced, so this is the premiere. Kelley has done numerous projects with Milwaukee Opera Theatre in the past 12

years. I’m excited to be reunited with artists I care a lot about and admire.

One thing I love about Mozart is his commitment to play, and [Rourke and Einhorn] have embraced that. Part One takes place in 1999. The principal characters are college students, a couple who were high school sweethearts. Part Two takes place in 2019 at their college reunion. The orchestra is also reimagined — it’s as if a college band is playing the score in a student union.

The Florentine season also includes a special concert called “Covers,” with the young violin and cello duo SistaStrings.

It’s a very exciting period for the Florentine, a real moment of transformation for the organization. “Covers” will be a community event where the imagination and

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musicianship of SistaStrings meets what we think of as the big opera standards.

Your Milwaukee Opera Theatre season plans include a new collaboration with Danceworks Performance MKE.

We’ve collaborated every other year since 2011. Even in the pandemic, we did an art song concert in the Danceworks parking lot. I think this time we’re going to do an adaptation of “Rusalka,” an opera by Dvořák that’s not very frequently done.

And the rest of MOT’s season?

We’re commissioning a “Night of the Living Opera,” an adaptation of “Night of the Living Dead.” We’ll present it as a reading this fall, with the planned full production the following fall.

We’re doing a holiday album with the Decameron Opera Coalition, the group of independent companies that have been working together digitally since the pandemic started. We’ll contribute a new holiday song to this national album. The first project we did was in 2020: each company adapted a story from Boccaccio’s “Decameron,” with the COVID pandemic replacing the plague as the illness.

We’re working with Milwaukee’s Quasimondo Physical Theatre on a shadow puppet opera anthology for the spring — something like 12 madcap operas in 60 minutes of craziness.

In creating a season, what inspires you?

Listening to what the artists in town are interested in making, then trying to figure out a way to help that become manifest. I think of it as being ego-less. You’re not even there in a way, or you’re so fully present that you disappear. MKE