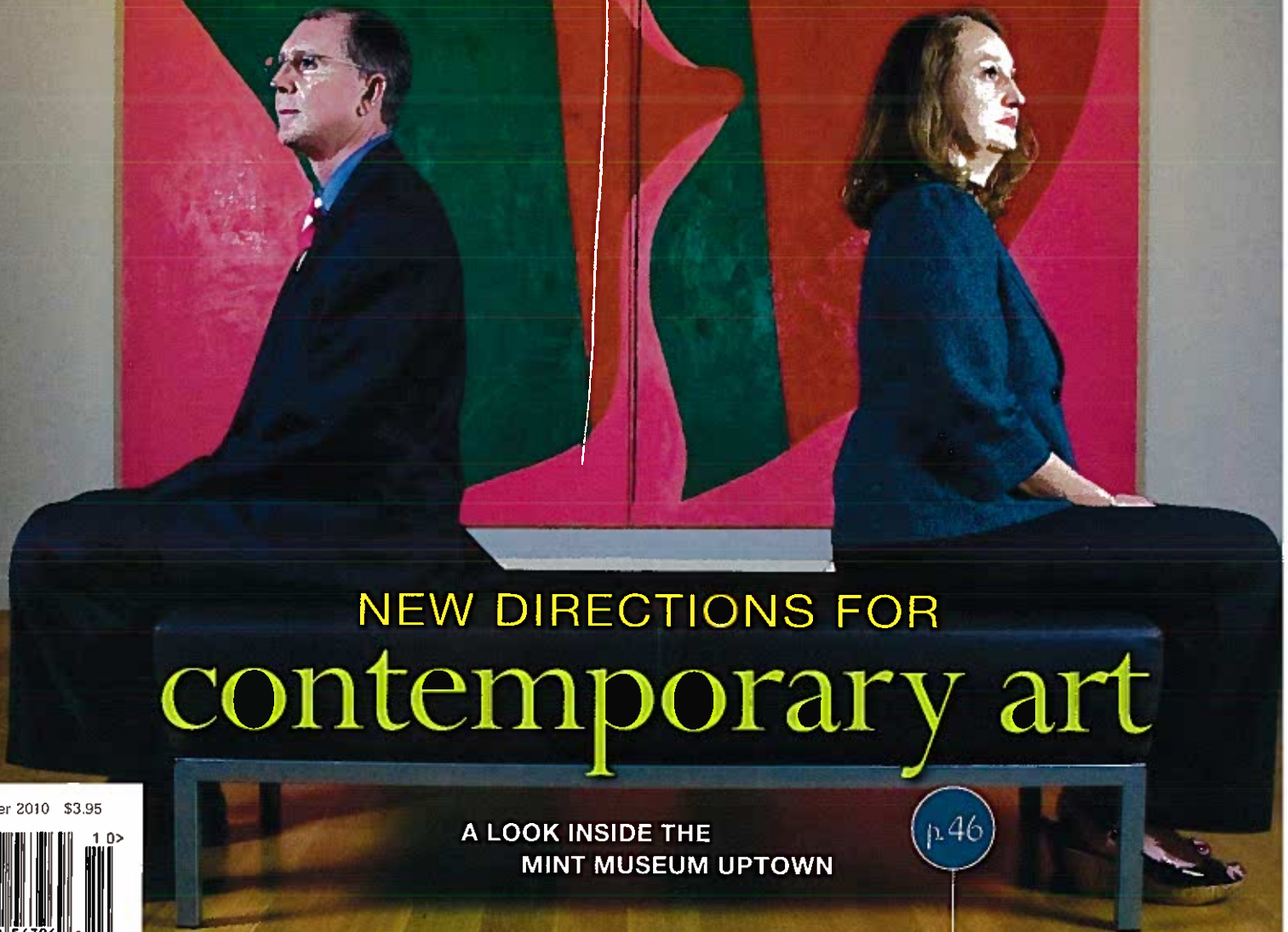


Plus: Think pink during Breast Cancer Awareness Month

SOUTH PARK

MAGAZINE



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A LOOK INSIDE THE
MINT MUSEUM UPTOWN

p.46

arts

Opera reaches out

LOCAL COMPANY COPES WITH THE DOWNTURN BY BROADENING ITS AUDIENCE

STORY BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OPERA CAROLINA

It's a tough time to be an opera supporter in Charlotte. After seeing Opera Carolina's budget slashed by more than a third due to funding cutbacks and ticket-sale slumps, you'd think James Meena, the opera's general director and principal conductor, would be getting discouraged. But on the contrary, Meena — now celebrating his 11th year at the company's helm — is insisting he's up to the task of moving ahead.

"There is no question that we are in trouble in Charlotte," says Meena, "Performing arts have atrophied across the region.... At Opera Carolina, it's time for us to do our best work, challenge kneejerk reactions and fight for what we think is important for the cultural landscape of our community."

He adds: "Quality is king for us. It is precisely when times are tough when we have to be at our best."

Meena is perhaps the company's toughest critic. "We are a grand opera company, which means we stage large-scale works like 'The Flying Dutchman' and 'Otello,'" he says. "We must deliver on a grand



LA TRAVIATA

Want to support the opera?

Friends of the Opera:

MacGregor Christner

704-491-3122

MacGregor@alumni.utexas.net

BRAVO!

704-332-7177 x210

www.meetup.com/bravooperacarolina

info@operayoungprofessionals.org

Opera Guild:

Membership Chair

Opera Guild of Charlotte, Inc.

P.O. Box 470132

Charlotte, NC 28247-0132



COSI FAN TUTTE SCENERY DESIGNED
BY BRIAN PERCHALUK



OPERA EXPRESS - PERFORMING "BILLY GOATS GRUFF"



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scale and have every aspect of the opera experience deliver for our audience.”

Audience development for the opera today is so much more than an “If you build it, they will come” mentality. Opera Carolina’s array of outreach programs rivals that of any performance art institution in the Queen City.

The company routinely holds intimate opera dinners featuring principal artists sharing in-depth perspective on upcoming performances. It partners with area employers to bring performers on-site and hold special employee nights at the opera. And three affinity groups host opera-centric activities:

- **Friends of The Opera** recruits volunteers and hosts social events such as an annual piano bar sing-along and wine and hors d’oeuvres receptions. Fundraising and financial support are playing an increasing role in the organization’s emphasis. “Opera Carolina has done a tremendous job of controlling costs and managing the scale of the offerings and productions to fit the economic realities we face,” says MacGregor Christner, the group’s president.

He works to educate first-timers about the merits of opera. “People should realize that the art form was created back in the time when television and film did not exist. Comedy, drama, romance are all featured in opera,” he says. “It really is spectacular.”

- **BRAVO!** is Opera Carolina’s group for young professionals, from 22- to 40-something. Members participate in pre-opera dinners and discussions, after-parties and “meetups.” The free membership brings discounts on tickets, an e-newsletter and members-only events throughout the year.

“One thing many people don’t realize is how accessible and affordable Opera Carolina can be,” says Laura Collinge, who co-founded BRAVO! in 2004. “Balcony seats for a performance are often under \$20, and many of the social events are free.”

- The longest-standing affinity group is the **Opera Guild of Charlotte, Inc.** Founded in 1954, its purpose is to further education and appreciation and lend assistance and financial aid. During its existence, the Guild has contributed more than a million dollars to Opera Carolina and has supported music education programs in Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. The Guild has a longstanding vocal competition for aspiring young singers

Opera Carolina’s
2010-2011 season lineup:

Così fan tutte --
The School For Lovers

October 16, 17, 21

The 20th of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s 22 operas, *Così fan tutte* translates as “thus do all women.” The opera paired Mozart with the brilliant librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte in one of their three collaborations.

A variation on the classic opera buffa or comic style opera, the story finds Don Alfonso wagering of Guglielmo and Ferrando that their fiancées Fiordiligi and Dorabella are no more trustworthy in matters of love than any other women. Disguises, deception and temptation from their lovers create mayhem.

Meena calls *Così* a “literary masterpiece” and one of Mozart’s most memorable and beloved operas.

La Traviata

February 3, 5, 6, 2011

Fully expressing his musical and dramatic power, Verdi’s *La Traviata* is based upon Alexander Dumas Junior’s play, *La Dame aux Camélias*. Meena considers this one of Verdi’s greatest works. “This dignified tragedy is as delicate as a crystal chandelier,” he says.

Operagoers will find an illicit love affair, honor, jealousy and death on full display in this epic masterpiece.

H.M.S. Pinafore

May 12, 14, 15, 2011

Gilbert and Sullivan practically defined operetta in Victorian England and collaborated on 15, including the “Mikado,” “The Gondoliers,” and most famously, “The Pirates of Penzance.”

“H.M.S. Pinafore” represented their first worldwide success and satirized the Royal Navy and British society.

“Gilbert’s plots remain perfect examples of ‘Topsy-turvydom,’ in which unusual characters rub elbows with English nobility in situations that spoof social conventions with exceptional rhymes and puns that served as a model for the American musicals of Cole Porter and Ira Gershwin,” says Meena.

**More: 704-332-7177 or
www.operacarolina.org**