Our First Season was a Big Success!

We are so happy to report that the first official season of Lyric Theatre @ Illinois has come to a close, and that it was an artistic, financial, and educational success. There are many people to thank: the School of Music voice, choral, accompanying, and orchestral faculty, particularly Jerold and Stasia Siena, Dawn Harris, Dennis Helmrich and Louis Bergonzi; the Krannert Center Level 21 team, particularly Tom Korder and Terri Ciofalo; our generous donors, particularly Paul and Karen Rosenberg, Paul and Virginia Uhlenhop, A. Mark Neuman, Ron Johnson, and the Illinois Opera Theater Enthusiasts.

Lyric Theatre is part of the School of Music in the College of Fine and Applied Arts and collaborates very closely with the Departments of Theatre and Dance in the incomparable Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. Without the vision and support of Dean Edward Feser and the Krannert Board of Producers: Mike Ross, Jeffrey Jenkins, and Jan Erkert, we could never do what we do.

We want to thank the students—we work for them. Their talent, enthusiasm, and dedication make each day a very fun and rewarding one to come to work. Thank you to the acting students from the Department of Theatre who joined us in *Into the Woods* and *Polly*.

Congratulations particularly to our graduating seniors—Ellen Bialek, Eddie Brennan, Ruth Kenney, and Claire Swale.

Thank you to our graduate assistants, Timothy Accurso, Michael Bagby, Filippo Ciabatti; Amanda Kasem, Mark Stingley, Caitlin Powell, Rosemary Hamington, Jin Uk Lee, and Jorge Belonni.

Have a beautiful summer, and we look forward to seeing you in 2015-16.

The Lyric Theatre Team

Jeff Magee, Producer
Julie Jordan Gunn
Nathan Gunn
Sarah Wigley Johnson
Michael Tilley
Dear Friends,

I’d like to thank you all for making the inaugural season of Lyric Theatre @ Illinois a great success. The season began with an hilarious production of the classic Donizetti opera “The Elixir of Love” followed by the charming Viennese operetta “The Merry Widow” and then topped off with Sondheim’s dark comedy “Into the Woods”. As the season progressed so did ticket sales. It has been a banner year.

As many of you know the Lyric Theatre program does far more than three main stage shows a season. We also have the “Studio Program” for undergraduate students. It’s designed to teach them the basic skills of stage craft. We have “Opera Scenes” for our graduate students which involves more advanced skills in language, acting, movement and dance. Then there is the LTI Workshop which brings in new works by seasoned professionals. This program gives them the opportunity to workshop their new pieces and it gives our students the opportunity to have real stage time with professional composers and librettists.

I am just as excited for next season. We have decided to celebrate Shakespeare’s life in our 2015-16 season by performing A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Beatrice and Benedict (Much ado about Nothing), and Kiss me Kate (Taming of the Shrew). LTI Studio and Opera Scenes will create programs, as always, around the talents of our students, and LTI Workshop will have a libretto (and orchestral) reading of a new work by Mohammed Fairouz about the life of Benazir Bhutto.

Although our first season at Lyric Theatre has been a success we still have much to do in order to make this program the standard by which others are judged. I want to thank all of those students that built our shows. Without you there would be no lighting, no sets, no costumes, and no stage management. I’d like to thank their professors for guiding them and the Krannert staff for managing all of this. I want to thank our students for their enthusiasm and commitment to this most complex art form and it goes without saying that the team at Lyric Theatre is the best.

Mostly, I’d like to thank our audience and our donors. I’m proud to be able to bring in artists from around the world to work with our students. It exposes them to the professional performing world while still in the safe environment of the School of Music and the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. In order to keep doing so we need your annual financial support. Let’s show the world what our University, our community, our state and our country hold dear.

Sing On! and Go ILLINI!

Nathan Gunn
General Director
Lyric Theatre at Illinois
Beatrice and Benedict
Comedy and Romance meet in Hector Berlioz's opera 'Beatrice and Benedict.' This musical retelling of Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing' explores the fine line between love and loathing. Through clever manipulation by a supporting cast of characters, Beatrice and Benedict discover a deep attraction to one another below a facade of entertaining insults, sarcasm and snide remarks.

Directed by Michael Foster
Conducted by Claire Levacher
Performances Nov 5,6,7,8

A Midsummer Night’s Dream
In one, mad, moonlit night, deep in the forest, everybody’s life is about to change... The story of A Midsummer Night’s Dream is timeless, romantic and very funny. Britten has brilliantly transformed Shakespeare’s fantastical romp into an opera that both lifts the spirits and tickles the ribs, a night of pure entertainment, bows you over with its romanticism, and sends you to bed, to dream, chuckling at the madcap zaniness of its comedy.

Directed by Christopher Gillette
Conducted by Fillipo Ciabatti
Performances Feb 18, 19, 20, 21

Kiss me, Kate
Shakespeare’s uproarious “Taming of the Shrew” combine with Cole Porter’s catching music and lyrics to give audiences the beloved, classic musical Kiss Me Kate. This is a play-within-a-play where each cast member’s on-stage life is complicated by what is happening offstage, accompanied by musical numbers such as "Too Darn Hot", "So In Love", "Wunderbar", "Brush Up Your Shakespeare", "I Hate Men", and "Another Op’nin, Another Show". Choreographed by Endalyn Taylor (Broadway: The Lion King, Carousel, Aida) and directed by Sarah Johnson, this is sure to be an enchanted evening you will not want to miss!

Conducted by Louis Bergonzi
Performances Apr 21, 22, 23, 24

Our musical staff has fun and works hard: assistant conductors and pianists Filippo ciabatti, Timothy Accurso, and Michael Bagby
2015-2016 Preview Bhutto

Lyric Theatre’s Preview Performance of the 2015-2016 season will be the world’s first orchestra reading of Bhutto, an opera about three Pakistani leaders: Zulfikar Bhutto, General Zia ul Haq, and Benazir Bhutto. With an original score by the fiercely talented Mohammed Fairouz (Sumeida’s Song) and libretto by Fairouz and critically acclaimed journalist and novelist Mohammed Hanif (BBC, A Case of Exploding Mangoes,) and featuring Nathan Gunn as Zulfikar Bhutto, Lyric Theatre students, and the University of Illinois Symphony Orchestra, Bhutto is the first joint commission of Lyric Theatre @ Illinois, the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh Opera, and Beth Morrison Projects.

The reading will be held April 7th, 2015 at 1pm in the Festival Theatre.

“… Mr. Fairouz’s multilayered music catches the complexities and crosscurrents of this family and the grim realities of their lives… There are hints of various Western contemporary idioms in his musical language: American neo-Romanticism; stretches of near-atonality that evoke Berg; astringent washes of sounds that seem inspired by Ligeti, who was one of Mr. Fairouz’s teachers. Yet the Arabic elements of his style—microtonal modes, spiraling dance rhythms, plaintive melodic writing—give fresh, distinctive jolts to the Western elements… It would be rewarding to hear Sumeida’s Song with its full orchestration in a larger space. But this gripping chamber version shows the dramatic potential of black-box opera.”

—Anthony Tommasini, New York Times
Deserting the Confederate army and fleeing the hospital to reunite with the love of his life, wounded Civil War soldier W. P. Inman endures an American odyssey that has gripped millions of readers — and now takes the opera stage. In this highly anticipated world premiere, the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Jennifer Higdon and Lyric Theatre favorite Gene Scheer capture the fervor of Charles Frazier’s thrilling novel *Cold Mountain* with their distinctive technical brilliance and audience appeal. Nathan Gunn, the go-to lyric baritone for heroic roles, is ideally cast as Inman, returning to Santa Fe after more than 15 years. His beloved Ada Monroe is created by the Grammy Award-winning Isabel Leonard. Rounding out the principal cast is tenor Jay Hunter Morris, whose recent Siegfried took the Metropolitan Opera by storm. Miguel Harth-Bedoya, remembered for Osvaldo Golijov’s Ainadamar in 2005, conducts.

Performances begin August 1, 2015. There will be a special reception for the friends of Lyric Theatre on August 15th at the home of Dick Schacht and Judith Rowan. Contact David Allen for more details at allend@illinois.edu

She [Higdon] writes in an extraordinarily communicative manner, but without the slightest hint of pandering. There's something very American in the sound of her music, and something I'm tempted to call joyful—not in terms of what is expressed...but in how it is expressed. She is a composer in love with composing.

*The Baltimore Sun*
Meet the Board of Advisors

By Stephen Fiol

During the summer of 2014 Nathan and Julie Gunn and David Allen (SOM Development) met with Stephen Fiol regarding the creation of a Board of Advisors to Lyric Theatre’s overall program and especially the main stage performance season. The group would consist of a small number of “community leaders committed to keeping the performing arts alive.” They identified individuals with unique expertise and relationship’s with the local community.

In addition to the faculty of Lyric Theatre the members of the Board of Advisors consists of Gary Ambler, Lois Rath, Richard (“Rick”) Murphy, Todd Salen, Amy Fuller and Stephen Fiol. This group of individuals hold important ties to our community in the areas of education at all levels, business, and the performing arts. Collectively they are associated with a wide range of professional organizations in Champaign-Urbana.

September 19, 2015 Nathan and Julie Gunn invited the group to an initial meeting at the Country Club. The Board was provided with a Mission Statement:

“The Lyric Theatre @ Illinois Board of Advisors is a board of Champaign-Urbana community leaders committed to keeping the performing arts alive, vibrant and relevant. The board works with the General Director of the Lyric Theatre on an advisory level in order to create better communication with the community, to discuss repertoire, and to help secure the future of the Lyric Theatre program.”

The membership committed to meet at least once after each main stage production. The meetings to date have dealt primarily with ways of increasing attendance at performances, improving marketing, increasing donor giving, building future audience, increasing visibility with our student populations at UIUC and the public and private K-12 schools, and creating a more diverse audience.

The Board looks forward to the implementation of new initiatives on behalf of Lyric Theatre for the 2015-16 academic year.
Outreach and Public Engagement

Our inaugural season came with a surge in outreach activities that added excitement and enrichment to middle schools, high schools, and the surrounding community. The characters of Into the Woods were brought to life with Yankee Ridge Middle School's two-day visit to the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts. Michael Tilley and Sarah Johnson guided students in workshops about how to use your voice and body while onstage, also collaborating with students to create choreography to the song "Into the Woods." Students were dazzled with a special appearance from Cinderella (Claire Swale), fascinated by a close look at costumes by designer Kim Curtis, and delighted to walk around our raked stage and see the foliage up close.

Blue Ridge High School also spent a discovery-filled day at KCPA during the month of April. Activities included a movement and improvisation workshop from Professors Tilley and Johnson and a performance from several Lyric Theatre students including Katherine Bokencamp, Emilie Huber, Eddie Brennan, and Adrian Sanchez. Blue Ridge students attended our Sunday performance of Into the Woods after getting to know about Lyric Theatre @ Illinois and all of the possibilities KCPA holds for this community.

Urbana High School was spellbound after a visit from professors Tilley and Johnson accompanied by the Witch in Into the Woods (Ellen Fred) on April 16th.

LTI presented both musical theatre and opera scenes and songs at two World Voice Day Events in collaboration with the department of Speech and Hearing Sciences on April 15th and 16th. Students performed at the Carle Center's Atrium as well as the Student Union to spread the word that Lyric Theatre is ready to share our time and talent with the community.
The Studio Class, co-taught by Sarah Wigley Johnson and Michael Tilley, guides mostly undergraduate students in an introduction to stagecraft and meaningful communication. By focusing on two distinct historical genres simultaneously, we help the students identify points of uniqueness as well as commonality across time, emphasizing the fundamental role of storytelling in compelling performance. Great emphasis is placed on improvisation and communication through a variety of acting, movement, and musical exercises. In the fall, the class was almost equally split between graduate and undergraduate students. The final concerts in Smith Music Hall, and again in the Krannert Art Museum (supplementing piano and organ with violin, clarinet, and cello) featured the works of Stephen Sondheim and W.A. Mozart, two of the most theatrical composers in the canon. The spring semester focused on Baroque Opera and Tin Pan Alley, and featured almost entirely undergraduate students, primarily from the School of Music, but also Anthropolgy and Mathematics. The final performance demonstrated huge growth for the students, and thrilled a standing room only audience at Krannert Art Museum.

A huge thank you is due to all of our Lyric Theatre patrons. Each year, the Krannert Center Box Office projects ticket sales for our three mainstage productions (Elixir of Love, The Merry Widow, and Into the Woods.) We had expected to sell 3700 tickets, and we sold 6388! That was 72% higher than expected. We are so grateful for your support, which allows us to mount excellent student-led productions in these challenging economic times. The future opera and musical theater industries thank you!

Educational matters (a Renée Fleming masterclass!)

By Michael Tilley

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More experienced students have the opportunity, as in years past, to enroll in Dr. Julie Gunn’s Opera Scenes class, where much longer excerpts are presented. Through such detailed work, young singers get the opportunity to explore longer character arcs as well as train for the endurance demands posed by operatic singing. The very nature of the class lends itself to tailoring selections to the specific talents of the enrolled students, and also allows the exploration of lesser-known repertoire alongside the ‘classics.’ With the assistance of Professor Dennis Helmrich and Director Dawn Harris, Dr. Gunn and her cadre of pianist/coaches guide the class through repertoire as difficult and diverse as Peter Grimes, Rusalka, Béatrice et Bénédict, Hänsel und Gretel, Abraham and Isaac, Così fan Tutte, and Don Pasquale. In the fall, a full house enjoyed the scenes presentation at Krannert Art Museum, and May’s performance took place in the familiar grandeur of the Tryon Festival Theater.

Tryon was also the home of the spring performance of Professor Johnson’s Musical Theater Repertoire class. Geared toward non-majors with a passion for musical theater, the stage was packed with devotees of this art form who not only entertained a large crowd in a diverse selection of ‘Crazy’ selections, but will also leave school to pursue whatever career path awaits them, full of new confidence and passion for supporting the performing arts. This popular course, introduced by Professor Johnson in the fall, will be continued in future years with the teaching help of Lyric Theatre Graduate Assistants, as we strive to fulfill the Dean’s goal of campuswide visibility and engagement through this and a myriad of projects yet to come. We will keep you posted!~

This summer from July 20 to August 8 in Piobbico Italy, Professors Michael Tilley and Yvonne Redman will join Illinois graduate and upcoming director of Lyric Theatre at Illinois’ Fall opera, Michael Foster at the Program for Lyric Theatre. The program takes place in the idyllic and hilly Le Marche region where students participate in daily Italian lessons and prepare and perform concerts of Italian lyric songs and arias with American musical theatre repertoire. Extra attention is placed on assisting students to build an entrepreneurial artistic vision, developing performance opportunities from the resources available to them, which can lay a foundation for a vibrant and successful career. Through language and musical performances students create lasting relationships with the Italian people and each other. See more at: lyricitaly.com
Not only was Lyric Theatre @ Illinois’s first year a triumph on the stage of the Tryon Festival Theater, our students challenged their limits in the classroom and in a variety of smaller local venues. As the creative team behind next year’s Preview Series this week in Chambana for a libretto reading of the new opera Bhutto, we are reminded of the success of the first work in this series, Polly Peachum. Written and conceived by Bill van Horn and Gene Scheer, with additional musical material from Chicago’s own Gary Fry, Polly delighted more than 200 people on April 11 in the Colwell Playhouse. The workshop helped the authors gain a more complete perspective on the play with music, which detailed the behind-the-scenes circumstances and cultural context surrounding the creation of John Gay’s revolutionary The Beggar’s Opera. The music, theatre, LAS, and high school students, joined by community members and even a surprise faculty member, prepared for 6 weeks under the guidance of Assistant Director Dawn Harris, Musical Director Michael Bagby (a first year DMA student of Dr. Julie Gunn), and faculty advisor Michael Tilley. Then the authors arrived for two weeks of intensive and rewarding work, staging the entire production and even rewriting the ending - that’s what workshops are for, right?! The final presentation was accompanied by guffaws and peals of laughter from an enthusiastic audience and provided a compelling demonstration of the integrative emphasis of the Lyric Theatre Department.

Polly Peachum
The Preview Series

WILD
Mr. Gay, may I introduce Miss Polly Peachum.

POLLY
We’ve met, Jonathan.

GAY
Thank you, Miss...for showing me the way.

WILD
She is both my passion and my protégé, Mr. Gay. She has taught me the rewards of love and I have taught her the wages of sin. She can coax a sovereign from the stingiest miser. She can feign palsy, rickets, cholera and several other diseases, as yet unnamed. The world of the beggar, Mr. Gay, like the world of the actor, survives on artifice and trickery.

Chris Anderson, Madeline Whitesell and Lyle Jackson