

Stuart Holt Hits New York

by Evans Donnell

An alliance between Metro Nashville Public Schools, Nashville Opera, and the Metropolitan Opera is giving students a chance to explore the lessons and possibilities of world-class opera.

That alliance has given each a chance to shine: the Met made MNPS a pilot national school district partner when its Peabody Award-winning *HD Live in Schools* program was expanded beyond New York in 2008. And Stuart Holt, Nashville Opera's highly regarded Director of Education and Outreach, made such an impression



Mojca Erdmann as Zerlina and Mariusz Kwiecien as the title character in the Met's new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*.



Stuart Holt, Nashville Opera Director of Education and Outreach

on the folks at Lincoln Center that he was asked to make a presentation to program educators from around the country when they gathered in New York in October.

"He's an optimist, so very generous, and a very creative guy," Met Education Director Marsha Drummond says. "He's willing to do multiple trainings with teachers to get them excited about opera and do things like bringing them into dress rehearsals at Nashville Opera. He really makes opera accessible."

Holt's presentation focused on making Charles Gounod's 1859 grand opera *Faust*, which students here and elsewhere watch at movie theaters this December, come alive in the classroom. The production helmed by Tony Award-winning director Des McAnuff (*Jersey Boys*) updates the story to the first half of the twentieth century.

"I made a presentation that encouraged teachers to play musical excerpts from the opera in their classrooms, teach the basic themes of *Faust*, and also connect it to everyday activities for students in their classes."

Antioch High School Choral Director Connie H. McCain has been part of the program since it started here. She made trips to New York the past two years, so she got to see Holt's presentation. "He was wonderful," she says. "He represented Nashville extremely well."

Demystifying opera—connecting it to modern cultural references from Disney films like *The Little Mermaid* to TV shows like *The Simpsons* is one of the ways that's done—is a crucial component of the *HD Live in Schools* outreach, according to Holt. "At the end of the day, opera is really about stories," he notes. "What I try to do is share the excitement of that story and show how music helps tell that story."

Carol Crittenden, Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator for MNPS, points up another connection that makes *HD Live in Schools* more than a cultural embrace for middle school and high school participants from six schools: “When they let the kids go backstage, when they see the interviews, the set changes, and what musicians, designers, technical people, and others are doing,” she says, “it’s not only about opera, it’s about career opportunities in several fields.”

“The kids are absolutely captivated by the look they get backstage. The possibilities they may explore because of that are exciting to think about.”

Why was MNPS one of the program’s charter districts? “Nashville was just a natural choice for us. It has good music education, and (Holt) jumped on board right away, so we knew we had a good partner with Nashville Opera as well as a good partner with (MNPS),” Drummond explains.

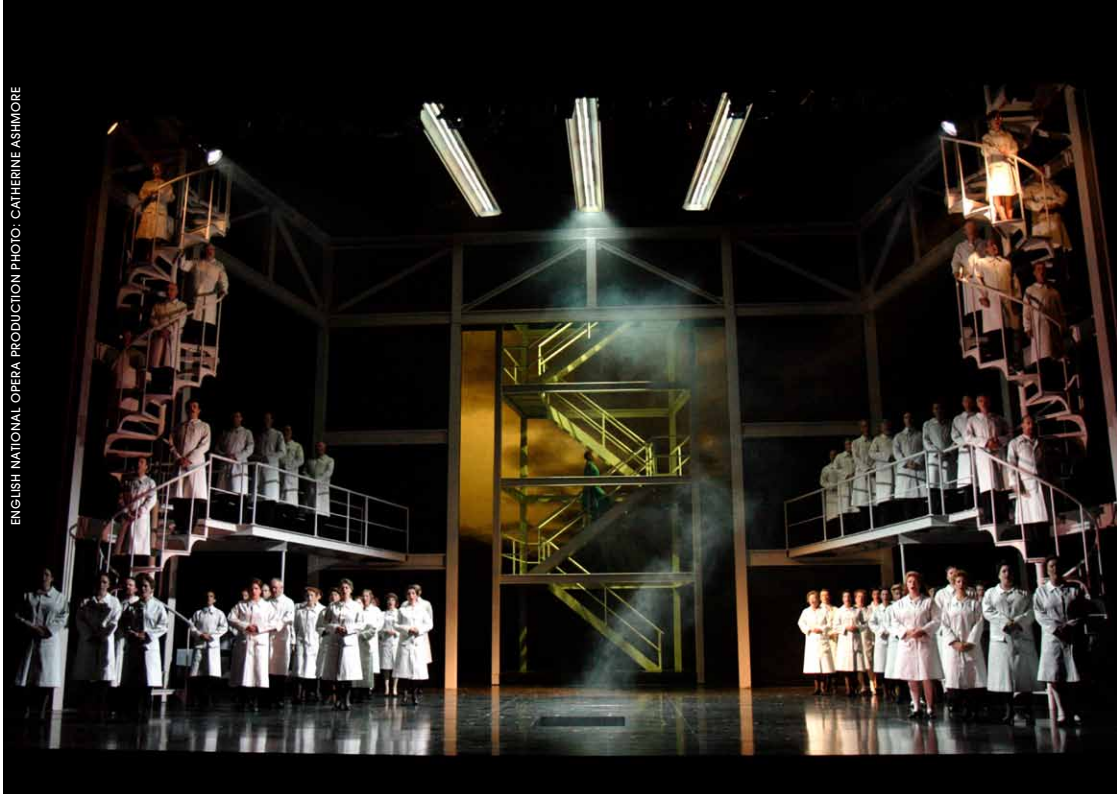
Students went to Regal Green Hills Stadium 16 in October for a transmission of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* that was given a youthful interpretation under the direction of Tony winner Michael Grandage (*Red*). After December’s *Faust* they’ll view *The Enchanted Island*, a new Baroque pastiche with music by Handel, Vivaldi, Rameau, and elements of William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in January.

Giuseppe Verdi’s classic *La Traviata*—which was given an inventive modern spin by German director Willy Decker earlier this year at the Met—screens for Metro students in April, a month where they will also attend the final dress rehearsal of Nashville Opera’s new production of Giacomo Puccini’s *Girl of the Golden West*.

Crittenden and McCain say transportation is a big challenge—using a school activity bus this year has helped McCain get students from Antioch to Green Hills for the transmissions, and Crittenden says MNPS is seeking sponsors to make transportation easier.

The cultural, educational, and vocational possibilities presented by the *HD Live in Schools* program make such struggles worthwhile for McCain, Crittenden, and others, though. “Our kids get to see opera at its best via video,” McCain says. “It is an opportunity I’m not going to miss for my students. If that means giving up four Saturdays a year, I’m glad to do it.”

For more information on the Met’s *HD Live in Schools* program please visit www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/about/education/index.aspx. For more information on Nashville Opera’s education and outreach work please visit www.nashvilleopera.org/Education_&_Outreach.html.



Act three, scene three from Gounod’s *Faust* in a production by Des McAnuff.



Jonas Kaufmann in the title role of Gounod’s *Faust*.



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