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ENRIQUE MAZZOLA – LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO'S NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR

Conductor Enrique Mazzola, Lyric Opera of Chicago's new Music Director, talked to Marco Stücklin for the OPERNMAGAZIN-Interview.

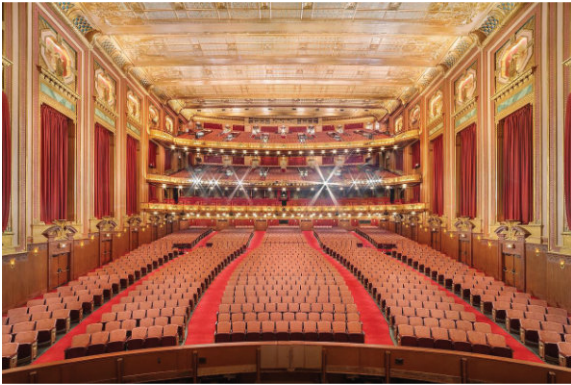
DAS OPERNMAGAZIN/OM: When we met two years ago in Zurich and Salzburg, you indicated that a big step in your career was imminent. Meanwhile, it is a very pleasant fact that from season 2021/22 onwards you will be music director of the famous LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO. How did the engagement at this leading opera house in the USA come about?

Enrique Mazzola/EM: It all happened after I conducted *I puritani* here in Chicago and exactly during my *La fille du régiment* at the MET. I had a wonderful relationship with the Lyric Opera of Chicago orchestra, with the chorus, and also with the administration. When Sir Andrew Davis decided to end his commitment as music director in Chicago, they started the search for a new

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Enrique Mazzola – Neuer Musikdirektor der Lyric Opera of Chicago.

music director. At the end Mr Freud, our general director, came to me with this wonderful question: “Would you like to be our next music director?” and I answered without any hesitation: “Yes!!!”



Lyric Opera Chicago / photo @ Darris Lee Harris

OM: The LOC is an opera house with a great history and reputation. What is it that appeals to you most about this new challenge?

EM: What is marvelous for me, is that I can start working in opera with my own “family,” orchestra, chorus, everyone at the Lyric, and can bring them my 25 years of experience of opera around the world, and at the same time they can give me their experience as a leading opera house in the world. I would say: a perfect combination!

OM: Such a task requires a lot of planning. How did you approach this challenge?

EM: Actually, I became music director only from August, but the planning of this season started three years ago. I can assure you, there is a lot to do before the opening night of a show, and very often the first steps for a new title start three, four, even five years before the premiere!

OM: Due to the covid-19 pandemic, many projects had to get canceled or delayed, and one had to develop completely new ideas in order to remain in the awareness of the public. What was the biggest challenge?

EM: I think the pandemic has been a challenging time for everyone. For the arts world, it was particularly difficult with cancellations. At first, we all felt so frustrated; but I saw around me—and in myself too—a desire to react to the silence of the arts world at the beginning of the pandemic, a reaction which led to a lot of different streamed shows. Here at Lyric we have been really busy, creating so many shows, and we developed new skills in communicating opera through filming. Last but not least our *Pagliacci* movie, which had the backstage of the Lyric as natural scene set! (You can [watch the *Pagliacci* movie on our website!](#))

OM: The work as music director at such a well reputed house also depends on the cooperation with your orchestra and the entire team. How did you experience the preparatory phase?

EM: I have a very beautiful human and professional relationship with the orchestra and the

chorus here at LOC. We built this relationship in the past, and it's based on a real mutual trust. It's something unique and strong, of which I am very proud.

OM: How do you experience the cooperation with the orchestra, and the rehearsals at the LOC?

EM: Here in the US, everything tends to be somehow faster than in Europe. Here, in general, all musicians are fully prepared at the first rehearsal, and consequently there are fewer rehearsals.

OM: Traveling to the USA was very difficult and sometimes even impossible. How did you experience the planning phase under such difficult conditions?

EM: You are right, it has been very difficult to travel to the US in the last 18 months. I have to thank all the administration of LOC for all the efforts to make my travels possible. I know of other European artists who had to cancel their work in the US because of problems with documents—passports, visas and so on—and I really hope that soon everything will be back to normal between the US and the EU.

OM: A house like the LOC depends on patrons and sponsors. What are your tasks to keep in touch with these generous music lovers?

EM: It's part of my work at LOC to be constantly in contact with our patrons, donors and sponsors. Our artistic life depends on the generosity of this important group of people who are deeply committed, deeply in love with opera and our institution. Every opportunity—a breakfast, a short break in rehearsals, a late dinner—is good to meet them and thank them for their support!



Enrique Mazzola / photo @ Joe Mazza

OM: What are your first projects in the new 2021/22 season?

EM: Two titles that I love so much, and that in some ways are so representative of my repertoire: *Macbeth* and *L'elisir d'amore*.

OM: What are your criteria for selecting the works in such a difficult time?

EM: Our season 21/22 is a good balance between classic and modern. We have some repertoire

titles like *Tosca* or *The Magic Flute*, and at the same time we present three contemporary operas. In some way, this season reflects the vibrancy of a city like Chicago, balanced between a glorious past and at the same time projected into the future.



Enrique Mazzola / photo @ Kyle Flubacker

OM: As a well-traveled conductor, you are used to changing locations. How did you settle in Chicago?

EM: First thing, I decided to move to Chicago. I think a music director should live in the place where he works. I am a new citizen here, and I have a lot to learn! I am open to explore the city, the different communities, the best and (why not!) the worst of the city, to be able to understand what is important to prepare for our LOC stage.

OM: What are the upcoming projects which you are going to realize outside of the LOC?

EM: I will have a season packed with new productions: *Anna Bolena* in Zurich, *Les vèpres siciliennes* in Berlin, another new production of *Anna Bolena* in Amsterdam, and a new *Madama Butterfly* in Bregenz. A magnificent season!

OM: Thank you for the interview. We wish you a lot of success, and congratulations on this new exciting challenge.

Editor's note: the three contemporary operas of the Lyric Opera of Chicago's 2021/22 season are [Florenzia en el Amazonas](#) by Daniel Catán, [Proving Up](#) by Missy Mazzoli & Royce Vavrek, and [Fire Shut Up in My Bones](#) by Terence Blanchard & Kasi Lemmons.

- *The OPERNMAGAZIN-Interview was conducted by Marco Stücklin / ed. DAS OPERNMAGAZIN-CH*
- *Enrique Mazzola's website: <https://enriquemazzola.com>*
- *The Lyric Opera of Chicago's website: <https://www.lyricopera.org>*
- *Title-photo: Enrique Mazzola © Todd Rosenberg*