

Gianandrea Noseda on the Future of Opera

Kayla Pantano (January 19, 2017)



At the Italian Cultural Institute of New York, Gianandrea Noseda, an Italian conductor currently in the pit at the Met, and music historian, Harvey Sachs, spoke about the changes opera has experienced over the years and possible solutions for its success in the future.

As part of the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [2] of New York's ongoing series highlighting Italian conductors, they recently welcomed [Gianandrea Noseda](#) [3], who is widely recognized as one of the best of our times. In conversation with [Harvey Sachs](#) [4], an accomplished writer and music historian, the event showcased the brilliant new production of Shakespeare's classic in Charles Gounod's adaption "[Roméo et Juliette](#) [5]" at the Metropolitan Opera House. Vibrantly led by no other than Noseda, the show will run until March 18. Together Sachs and Noseda also shed light on how the world of opera has changed throughout history, addressing the challenges the industry faces today but with an overwhelming air of optimism for its future.

Harvey Sachs: Writer and Music Historian



While Sachs received much of his musical training in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, he lived his entire adult life throughout Europe before settling in New York just over ten years ago. Of his many accomplishments, on top of his nine published books and over 700 articles, he founded the annual Festival del Quartetto d'Archi in Arezzo, Italy, in 1991, which remains the only festival in the country dedicated to the string quartet. He also served as the Artistic Director of the [Società del Quartetto di Milano](#) [6], Italy's most prestigious concert organization, from 2004-2006.

Gianandrea Noseda: Internationally Recognized Conductor

Noseda, who hails from Northern Italy—apparent from his blonde hair, blue eyes, and light Milanese accent, was named the International Opera Awards Conductor of the Year 2016 and Musical America's Conductor of the Year 2015. Starting in the 2017-18 season, he will become the Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Noseda also serves as the Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Orquestra de Cadaqués.

Since 2007, he has led the Teatro Regio Torino, propelling the opera house onto a global stage where it has become one of Italy's most important cultural exports. He was at the helm of the [BBC Philharmonic](#) [7] from 2002 to 2011 and in 1997 he was appointed the first foreign Principal Guest Conductor of the [Mariinsky Theatre](#) [8], a position he held for a decade.

As proven by his extensive experience and thus too his limitless curiosity, his repertoire expands beyond Italian. Of course, this is evident with his mastery of Russian works from his time in St. Petersburg and his current endeavor into French opera. In fact, his eclectic background is mirrored in "Roméo et Juliette," as Noseda pointed out: "A British writer wrote the play that takes place in Verona orchestrated in music composed by a Frenchman conducted by an Italian with an American company featuring a German soprano, so it's intriguing."

Opera's Past, Present, and Future

While Noseda wields the baton with remarkable fervency and athleticism at the podium, he's much less dramatic offstage; however, his passion for the art is equally overt. When Sachs questioned him on everything from the rehearsal process to the differences between French and Italian opera—the latter tends to be more dramatic, Noseda spoke for minutes on end, digging into the deeper meanings. One such topic they explored in great length was the transformation the opera world has experienced, starting with the downscaling of theaters.

In Italy, for example, there used to be an opera house in almost every town and village; this is simply not the case anymore. Noseda admits that there's no longer a demand for it, possibly due to the vast availability of other art forms. He also says that name recognition does not play the part it used to. Fifty years ago singers like Caruso were able to sell out more than 15 performances, but today even the best of talent can't draw a crowd.

Of course, opera houses operated differently when the art form first gained popularity. An impresario invested in productions and the company would do as many performances as the audience would continue to pay to go to. Once the show flopped, they would be ready in a couple of days with the next show. Now this is not possible for many reasons. For one, the productions were much simpler, especially from the visual point of view. There wasn't built out staging but rather printed backdrops they could reuse, and costumes were much less extravagant.

Furthermore, you have to schedule everything today. "The musicians' unions rightfully need to know if they're going to be employed for two months or two days," Sachs explained. "Everything has to be organized long in advance and it creates a whole different system that functioned one hundred or two hundred years ago." However, it's difficult to schedule an entire season when people no longer subscribe to shows. Now people are interested last minute, they buy a ticket and then they go. If they do commit to a subscription, it's only five or so shows at once. Therefore, "to organize a season is difficult," Noseda laments.



One of the major problems is that there is no longer commission for new operas. Noseda, among many others in the industry, often is at a loss for what to do. On the one hand, he wants to attract the masses by showing what is popular, what has proven to be successful. On the other, he feels that the people really do want something different. "In history, artists have always had to be very creative," he proclaimed. "We are not serving our field very well; we don't commission new operas. This is a tragedy." As an alternative, companies recreate interest by reviving the classics. In October, Noseda sold out 9 performances of "La Bohème" because he made it more modern and provocative. "If you don't do either one thing or the other, why would people go to the opera?" he asked. But it's a risk that only smaller companies tend to take. "When you do a new opera at the Met you have to fill almost 4,000 seats, it's a big problem," Sachs explained.

Noseda worries where the opera will be 100 years from now if new operas aren't being produced as rapidly as they were 150 years ago. "Will we exist still? I hope so. I'm not sure. It's very hard to say. Unless we find the way to connect and to present the opera, but you cannot force the opera to be something different because the opera is the opera. You have to use all the elements you have to make the opera, to sound, to look more believable," Noseda said. He continued to explain that instead of preserving, people have to revitalize. "I still believe it is a live art form, but to be taken as a live art form it needs new operas, which will subsequently enlighten the repertoire ones. But people will not follow. Beethoven was not followed with the last quartets, Mozart was not followed, but now we know Mozart, we don't know Dittersdorf or Hummel, who were much more famous at the time."

Despite all the challenges, Noseda is hopeful. He notes that technology has endless possibilities, not only to heighten the mystery, but also to push and to create new operas. He also believes that the proper funding can be achieved by combining public money with private sponsorship. He concludes that with more support, the world of opera can continue to reach the right standards. To him this means being more artistically involved in the performance and totally present in every moment.

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