

The year in review-theater

By Stephen Marc Beaudoin

2002 has still left many arts organizations reeling from the economic recession. Ticket sales are down at even our largest classical music institutions-it's tough to do satisfying, challenging work as an individual or group when you're just worried about pulling through the year.

Despite this recession, the ten groups and individuals below made outstanding contributions to Boston's classical music community in 2002.

Boston Lyric Opera: Bizet's "Carmen" on the Boston Common, September 20. The BLO returned free, open-air opera to Boston audiences for the first time in more than 30 years. By producing a series of educational outreach "teaser" programs to varied Boston communities leading up to the production, the BLO ensured that a diverse audience was exposed to the piece and to the company. Those outreach programs (and some smart marketing: you couldn't miss their "So hot we took it outside" campaign, adorning the side of every bus in Boston) paid off-audience attendance for two evening performances was in excess of 120,000, far exceeding the company's expectations. And the production, starring the fiery young Jossie Perez, was pretty good too. www.blo.org

Boston Modern Orchestra Project: Lukas Foss' opera "Griffelkin," semi-staged, March 29th, and their "Chinese in America" program, October 11. BMOP, as it is affectionately known, continues to present some of the most intellectually challenging/stimulating classical music concerts in Boston-and their repertoire is exclusively of the 20th and 21st centuries. "Griffelkin" was simply delightful-a necessary resurrection of a lovely little opera. The "Chinese..." program was an ear-opening evening, with star turns by pipa virtuoso Wu Man, and Xu Ke. www.bmop.org

Heinrich Christensen: any number of concerts in and around the city. Christensen, who in 2000 inherited the post of Music Director at historic King's Chapel from composer/organist Daniel Pinkham, is perhaps Boston's busiest and most accomplished organist/choir directors. His King's Chapel Concert Series programs are always tastefully selected and well-prepared. www.kings-chapel.org

Florestan Recital Project: "Women's Voices" program, November 16th. Florestan Recital Project-a welcome new presenter of song recital programs-entered their second season, dedicated to composers Daniel Pinkham and Ned Rorem, November 16. Krista River, Joe Dan Harper and Anne Kissel Harper helped make it an unforgettable evening. www.florestanrecitalproject.org

David Leisner: "Music of the Human Spirit" CD, "Celebration of Gay Composers" performance, February 1. Guitarist/composer David Leisner possesses a keenly intelligent musical mind, and his Boston appearances this year, when coupled with a new CD release, were testament to the ever-growing strength of that mind. www.davidleisner.com

New England String Ensemble: Season opening program, September 22. In 2002, Susan Davenny Wyner finally brought her fabulous Ensemble into Cambridge, and the group makes a long overdue Jordan Hall debut this January. Her September 22 program of C.P.E. and J.S. Bach, Rouse and Nielsen was simply stunning-Dominique Labelle thrilled us, as always, in J.S. Bach's "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen."
www.nese.net

Michael Norsworthy: premiere of Finnissy's "Giant Abstract Samba," November 10, and other concerts. There's nothing clarinetist Michael Norsworthy won't play: from Mozart to Carter to world premieres. His work in Michael Finnissy's new concerto for clarinet and wind ensemble (written for Norsworthy) was stunning: his star is clearly on the ascendant. www.msu.edu/~norswort/

Pandora's Vox: June 12 concert at Longy's Pickman Hall. Pandora's Vox appeared out of the blue last June and warmed Boston audiences with a strong, promising program of women's vocal chamber music. Let's hope to hear more from them. No website.

Drew Poling: any number of operas and concerts in and around the city. Poling, a baritone, is one of Boston's busier free-lance singers, and if you've only been to a handful of concerts or opera this year, you've probably seen him. Poling contributed strongly to local productions of "Griffelkin," "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame" and "Pirates of Penzance," among others. No website.

Radius Ensemble: Season-ending "Encore Concert," May 16. Jennifer Montbach, Director of the Radius Ensemble, is nobody's fool. She knows that classical chamber music has a stodgy reputation, and she wants to change that. Her mission is to reinvigorate classical chamber music for a new generation of concert-goers, and every season since its inception, her Ensemble has taken steps toward that goal. With interactive web-based program notes, pre-concert lectures and post-concert receptions, and the announcement of a Composer-in-Residency program for the 2003-04 season, Radius is clearly at the forefront of connecting with their audiences. Their May 16 "encore concert" was lively and engaging-audience members introduced their favorite pieces from the season's offerings. It was clear these listeners were touched by the group-and that is terribly exciting. www.radiusensemble.org