

LEARNING WHEN TO BREATHE

Performance as Art and Commodity in
Opera Breve's First Season

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis documents the growth of Opera Breve, a new performing arts organization in Vancouver, over the course of the 1997-98 season. The time frame begins with the company's conception in a basement cafeteria, and ends with a meeting a week following the season's final curtain. This chronicle of a new performing arts company, a self-initiated project by artists and arts managers to provide themselves artistic and managerial opportunities, is an example of how individuals with a shared ideal try to organize themselves into a productive entity. The thesis critically examines the main elements of the producing organization: artistic direction, management, marketing, etc. It examines how the current artistic, social and economic atmosphere affords and prevents cultural development. Finally, the thesis draws conclusions and makes recommendations for Opera Breve and, by extension, other new arts organizations.

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For Mari and for my mother

*Sing for your supper,
And you'll get breakfast.
Songbirds are not dumb,
They don't buy a crumb
Of bread
It's said.
So sing and you'll be fed.*

From "Sing for Your Supper"
Lyrics by Lorenz Hart
Music by Richard Rodgers
1938

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This is a success story. In March 1997, Opera Breve did not have a name, but it had a concept: the production of one-act operas, a virtually untouched repertoire, presented in a salon setting. As a professional company, it would provide principal roles to emerging young artists who had few such opportunities. By the end of its first season, 14 months later, Opera Breve was part of the Vancouver music landscape.

The success of Opera Breve's first season did not come easily. Events frequently seemed to conspire against the ability of the company to carry on, and to present two original opera productions at the season end in May 1998. When the project began in March 1997, I believed that with the team of me as executive director, and singers Emma Turnbull and Mari Hahn as co-artistic directors, the company could not help but succeed. Almost every day was carefully outlined in my official "Time Line" to production.

But something unexpected happened. Events just did not occur as planned. Personal relationships frayed, numerous plans were scrapped for lack of time, money, personnel, and motivation. Unimaginable successes occurred: early fund-raising events, the early and solid corporate support of Listel Vancouver. And disappointments saw fund-raising frustration, budget-overruns, and friends quitting the company in frustration.

As time went by, and plans and people fell away or fell apart, company focus narrowed to its fundamental goal: the production of two short operas in May. Opera Breve produced two fine one-act opera productions, with an artistic team and production quality that established the company's artistic aims: its repertoire, quality

of artists, and production concept. Additionally, groundwork for a second season, much of it the product of plans undertaken and abandoned, made the first season an undeniable achievement of foundation. A mailing list, for example, was compiled over course of the season, and can now be a vital marketing tool if used to its capacity.

Artistically, the most significant experiment was the transformation of the performance space, the ballroom at Listel Vancouver, into a salon-style space with chairs and low tables. Audience proximity to performance, and the overall environment created a pleasant, accessible, intimate operatic experience.

Additionally, beginning with the first public performance--the cabaret November 2--Opera Breve established a public profile and a recognizable name, one associated with some important local artists, including John Juliani, Donna Wong-Juliani, Kico Gonzalez-Risso, Ronald Fedoruk, Nancy Hermiston and the board's honorary member, Judith Forst.

The performers and members of the artistic team had good experiences, felt well-treated, were paid very well for a first season (an amount that is competitive with the Vancouver Opera's standard payment to non-Equity chorus members), and the company established a reputation as a good place to work.

The corporate support of Listel Vancouver, the continuing cabaret performances, 24 in total by the end of May, and the energy and excitement established among the Opera Breve audiences, have set the stage for a second season.

But the areas of funding, marketing, artistic and business management, and volunteer recruitment that fell short in the first season, must be addressed and improved. These are second-step problems, those challenges that a successful first

season provides. I hope my conclusions and recommendations reveal what I have learned, and what I believe Opera Breve can achieve in the near and more long-term future.

The question I ask in the thesis to this project is whether or not a new performing arts company can be established in the current financial and artistic climate. But one season is a poor definition for "established." In that, the original question was naive. Putting up two fully-staged professional productions in a significant achievement. Still, to become truly established means a company must have a management structure, however basic, with job descriptions for the core company members, and an organized system for marketing and producing operas, cabarets, and private performances. And it must follow a realistic plan for financial and artistic growth.

This thesis is a critical documentary of the growth of Opera Breve, from its conception in March 1997 to the end of the 1997-98 season in May 1998. It examines the main elements of the producing organization (artistic direction, management, etc.) critically. But it is not a traditional "case-study," where an outsider observes, evaluates, and makes recommendations to an organization. I am not an outsider. With Opera Breve I hoped to satisfy two interests: to chronicle and attempt to establish an arts organization, and to manage that organization as the start of what could become a career in arts management.

While considering potential careers to follow my MA Theatre program, I met with Howard Jang at Ballet B.C. who told me of the numerous programs for potential arts managers, and then told me his own story: he learned by doing. He managed a quartet of his friends.

I had hoped to discover an opportunity to manage a small organization

follow the completion of my MA. To make it an MA-related project, the source material for a thesis, allowed me not just experience, but the opportunity to critically examine a subject that has interested me for many years. The first season struggle of an arts organization is a topic on which little has been written, and a detailed case-study of that process would be original work.

In my first year of graduate work, I took a seminar on Opera Staging and Production with Nancy Hermiston and four of her graduate students. I was enthralled with opera, about which I knew little. I enjoyed the class, the opera discussions, and the talented singers whom I would see in recital and meet again in class the next Monday.

I met one morning with Emma Turnbull, one of my classmates, and we talked about few opportunities existed for young singers in Vancouver. A company in Edinburgh, she mentioned, toured Scotland with young singers performing short or one-act operas. This sounded like a great idea for a new local company. Mari Hahn, also in my opera seminar, wanted to join us. So we three embarked on a journey.

Peter Loeffler, my graduate advisor, encouraged this project in opera production and arts management. He and I agreed the chronicle I intended would comprise my graduating thesis. He warned against undertaking too much as a new company. I ignored him, at my peril. But that will be sufficiently revealed within these pages.

The structure of this thesis roughly follows the structure of a business text book. Each chapter begins with a critical overview of how this or that element of the company operated over the course of the season, followed by the main text which argues the point, using evidence from the season, and ending with conclusions

which include an attempt to understand why events occurred as they did.

I provide a basic chronology of events in Appendix I, which is intended to clarify the sequence of events and the time frame over which these events occurred.

The writing style is intentionally casual. Most people are referred to by their first names. I considered using last names, but that made it difficult to write about those with whom I worked so closely. And the formal tone of using last names would actually falsely characterize the nature of the project and my relationship to it. The fact is that I am not writing about subjects from whom I have an academic distance. That is both a strength and weakness, and must be acknowledged.

The intention of this thesis is not to praise or criticize my colleagues. Rather, I intend this document to operate as a case-study of how one new performing arts organization managed through its first season. I attempt to draw conclusions and make recommendations that would be of practical use to others who embark on such a project. To this end, I asked several Opera Breve colleagues to contribute short, personal accounts of the season that would be of practical use to others. These articles, which appear as the final chapter, do not necessarily concur with my thoughts. Provocative statements, each with a unique perspective, they strengthen this thesis by challenging its arguments and conclusions.

That I knew from the start that Opera Breve was to be the subject of my written thesis, shaped elements of my work as the company's executive director. Initially, I believed the prospect of writing a critical account of the season would not affect my work during the season. I would write about whatever happened in the course of the Opera Breve project once the project reached some form of conclusion. In theory, it would have been okay for the whole project to collapse within a month.

But in fact, I was always motivated, in part, by a desire to prove that a

company could be "established," and by the related desire that my thesis chronicle a personal success. I cannot know how much this affected the project. Ultimately, the reader may determine where this secondary motivation became primary.

Finally, given that I approached this project with an interest in an arts management career, I saw Opera Breve as an important career opportunity. I imagined maintaining my position with Opera Breve following a successful season, and developing my skills and reputation as a manager. In retrospect, some elements of management interest me more than others. I may even now have the skills to actually run a small arts organization, or take a junior role in a larger organization. But, as the season passed, I found myself more interested in opera repertoire, history and current international productions than in management. The artistic and academic elements of opera became a real fascination. The result is that while arts management remains a keen interest, it is not an area I want to pursue now. Opera Breve opened a new and compelling academic field to me.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL APPROACH

The philosophy that shaped my initial plan for this opera company is derived from a number of sources. After many years of covering the arts in Canada as an arts journalist, I had grown increasingly frustrated listening to harangues against government for failing to provide sufficient arts funding or, more frequently, for reducing that funding. For more than a decade, funding cuts have been constant, as has increasing government indifference to non-profit arts organizations.

Today, Canada's most established artists and arts managers were young and

active in the early '70s when funding from the Federal Government fairly bubbled over. There was ample funding for everything any self-proclaimed artists or arts group wanted to do. Some companies did not even budget for box-office: that income was simply unnecessary. Many now regard that as the golden age of Canadian art. But, in fact, it was only the age when there was endless gold, and it was not a case of deserving artists receiving appropriate state-funding. The public policy of the Federal Government to be seen to pour money into culture was politically motivated. The Trudeau government considered arts funding a politically astute use of public money: an expenditure that would encourage votes. Not the votes of artists themselves, a constituency that has never been electorally significant, but the votes of Canadians who considered culture funding a vital element of the new, mature, world-class nation of popular imagination.

The largesse to the arts ended quickly, as did the entire Expo '67 feels-good-to-be-Canadian/Trudeaumania environment that fuelled it. Indeed, the same prime minister who oversaw the outpouring of cash, cut it off before he left office in 1984.

The amount of available government money to the arts, and the ability of almost every artist and arts group to be funded almost automatically, never has been, and never will be, the same. Nor should it. But regardless of my opinion on the appropriate size and shape of government arts funding initiatives, it is naive and typically arrogant of artists to believe that the money not only should return, but must return, if art is to have a future in Canada. The sense of deserving makes it easy to be passive, self-righteous, and angry. It also produces artistic stagnation with small companies failing to thrive or failing to grow, and medium-size companies going bankrupt when their grants are suddenly reduced or denied. Rather than attend rallies demanding government action on a declared "crisis in the arts,"

groups and individuals ought to spend more time learning to develop funding alternatives, and actively pursuing that funding. Lobbying governments is important, and can create positive results, however small or temporary. But the period of government largesse is clearly over.

And that is clearly good. The great disaster of the early '70s is that so many mediocre individuals and organizations were able to receive funding, which fed their senses of pride, excellence, and significance. All of a sudden there was an abundance of artists, many of whom (and here I speak knowledgeably only of theatre) had little talent but a keen sense of entitlement. The legacy is an infrastructure of theatres and theatre buildings for governments to maintain, and a structure for awarding grants that is based on the decisions of these mediocre artists sitting on "peer juries." An arts establishment born of the early '70s has created the ugly reality of scarce funds awarded to the mediocre by the mediocre. The very basis of government funding is destructive, especially where the conflict-of-interest creates the constant potential for a jury-member to determine the size of grant to her best friend, the company that may produce his next play, or the orchestra that has refused to hire her for five consecutive seasons. Favours can be returned when the recipients sit on the jury the following year.

Existing institutions and established artists receive money first, before new organizations and new artists. This art-destroying system for the distribution of scarce funds is yet another example of government indifference. but it keeps artists relatively quiet. Any suggestion that a skilled bureaucrat or member of the general public be involved in grant decisions encourages outrage and accusations of philistinism from the arts community. A fundamental suicidality is revealed in this response: if the majority of arts funding is to come, now, from private and

corporate donors, the only appropriate behaviour by an artist with integrity is to refuse such support, and wither self-righteously.

Although I believe government has a responsibility to artists and arts groups, I did not want to enter the mess of the current system which amounts to a combination of begging and screaming and signing petitions. Instead, I imagined a company that would focus from the beginning on how to earn its own subsidies. That is, I saw the opera company subsidizing its main productions with money earned by its cabaret performances and private performances of operas and concerts, with additional money raised through membership drives, private donations, and corporate sponsorships, including in-kind donations.

With the ideal of self-sufficiency built into the concept for the first season, I wondered if the company might grow and grow over the years without ever looking to government for an arts grant. What I did like was for the company to look for the opportunities available to small businesses. I wanted to look to the government for assistance available to small businesses. I wanted this to be a successful small business, growing to employ three or four full-time staff and several contract workers (production teams and casts). I wanted Opera Breve to be not only a successful company, one established at a time when so many arts groups are reduced to producing almost nothing and actors are working for nothing, I wanted this to be a model for a new approach.

In this, I was influenced not only by my own experience writing about arts companies and their regular money problems/public complaints, casual discussions with arts journalists and arts funding bureaucrats. I was also absorbed by a 1996 book by the Carleton University English professor, Tom Henighan, The Presumption of Culture.

Henighan argues that the Federal Government and artist must adopt a new funding model if the arts are to maintain a level of artistic excellence with the limited government funding that is available. Henighan asserts the maintenance of artistic excellence, rather than a vague requirement that art contain appreciable nationalistic content or spirit, must be the primary focus of any funding system.

In his recommendations for spending at the federal level, he writes that funding should be based upon these criteria:

1. To guarantee the survival of our major arts and cultural institutions.
2. To develop and sustain a public broadcasting system (CBC) that includes both an ad-free FM-stereo cultural radio network and an ad-free alternative television channel that would program Canadian culture.
3. To sustain a Canadian film industry.
4. To encourage cultural development through "start-up" or seed grants at the grass roots.
5. To reward cultural achievement by honouring artists who make outstanding contributions to our national culture (113).

The first point would see funding to most institutions decline or disappear for their not having achieved a level of artistic significance. Only a handful of institutions would continue to be funded. And funding would be increased (from what is now almost nothing) to new cultural organizations (point 4), to foster the start of organizations with the understanding that continued funding is limited, and that new arts organizations, like most other organizations, must plan to operate in the absence of these funds after three or four years of partial assistance.

I considered not becoming a non-profit, but incorporating instead as a for-profit company. That, as I will outline later, proved impossible, for a surprising reason. I even toyed with the idea of becoming a public company, and trading on

the Vancouver Exchange. But that seemed too complicated, fraught with traps and too experimental. However provocative, this idea held too many implications I did not understand, and some I did. It seemed wrong, though I would be interested to see a small company with proper advice and guidance, try it.

And so self-sufficiency was the intended program. It is worth noting that I did not reveal any of these ideas to my colleagues. It seemed like a lot to explain, and unnecessary since my task as executive director was to see that the artistic elements were free and independent of the business end.

Very quickly, the principles I had so carefully considered began to fall away. This was partly out of a sense of responsibility to the group--Who am I to deny the company potential income?--and partly out of necessity. That Opera Breve received no money from any level of government over the course of its first season is not for lack of trying. But that failure, I think, only points up the original situation I had intended to address.

Ironically, it didn't matter if I or others believed we ought to apply for some government funding. That funding is so tied up in existing, often mediocre or worse arts groups, assistance for new groups is unavailable. Rules preclude any start-up assistance.

Still, I ask, is my original set of principles valid, or foolish? The season provided some answers.

CHAPTER III: MANAGEMENT

Management, the role I undertook for myself, became an overwhelming experience with much more to accomplish than was possible by one, inexperienced executive director over the period of time allotted to raise the company from an idea to a multi-faceted opera company. My lack of skill at arranging introductions to potential sponsors, subsequent meetings and bold requests for money added to the unforeseen elements that made the original business plan impossible to follow. My growing feelings of stress, anxiety, and managerial inadequacy only increased the difficulty of pursuing the project at all.

From the start, I understood that running Opera Breve was the task of running a small business. I prepared as best I could, reading some text books on the subject of business and business practices, starting up businesses, the importance of the business plan, etc.

For a model of a business plan, and other basics, I used The Complete Canadian Small Business Guide (1994). Not only does it outline fundamentals of business, and note areas that frequently trouble new businesses, it presents provocative lists, such as "Traits of a Successful Entrepreneur" (Gray and Gray 4-7), which include "Persistence," and "Ability to Handle Uncertainty Well." Both suggest an ability to experience and push aside the inevitable feelings of disappointment and anxiety and carry on with confidence. These are among the challenges that I, and others, would face with varying degrees of success.

The original management structure of Opera Breve was a five-member Board of Directors, empowered under the B.C. Societies Act to engage or remove members of the society's executive. The executive at the time of incorporation, in October, was

me, Emma and Mari. The Board of Directors consisted of Ron Fedoruk, design professor in the University of B.C. Theatre Department and my thesis advisor; Nancy Hermiston, head of UBC's voice and opera programmes; John Juliani, veteran local actor and director who is artistic director, and co-founder, of Savage God; Donna Wong-Juliani, former dancer and artists' agent, and co-founder and manager of Savage God; and Nathan Divinsky, long-time amateur Gilbert and Sullivan performer, co-owner of Bridges Restaurant, international chess champion, and retired UBC mathematics professor.

The required constitution of the society reads as follows:

The purposes of the society are to produce outstanding, artistically important productions of one-act operas from the international repertoire, to broaden the audience locally and through British Columbia (by touring) for classical performance, and for opera specifically, to present great works rarely or never staged professionally, to provide professional opportunities for trained, emerging artists, to bring opera and an appreciation of classical performance to students (school-age and post-secondary) through performance, discussion, workshops and seminars.

To me, the creation of the board was a formality. I had no sense that the group might operate as an advisory board, despite the years of artistic, arts management, and general business experience they represented. While I did take concerns and questions to Ron on occasion, in his capacity as my thesis advisor, I did not look to him for regular advice.

The three-person executive was established without clear responsibilities. While on the surface, it appeared self-evident that the two artistic directors would be responsible for production, and the executive director would undertake to see that management tasks such as fund-raising and marketing were taken care of, this is never how we operated.

Perhaps because it was I who invited Mari and Emma to join me in this

project, much of the artistic director's work was expected of me, or delegated to me. While I did intend to find directors for our productions, I also found myself researching repertoire, choosing repertoire, looking for pianists and tenors, arranging rehearsal space and hunting for stage managers. Many artistic directors' responsibilities were ignored or forgotten: casting was slow, the need of a designer was not addressed, no timely pre-production meeting for the Doctor Miracle cast, director, and music director. When I mentioned, in late February that there had been no meeting, the subsequent gathering revealed schedule conflicts that ought to have been addressed a month earlier. Neither of the artistic directors rose to the level of dynamic leader with a strong artistic vision.

As executive director, I undertook responsibility for everything and anything that ever needed to be done. I spent entire days by the phone, waiting for potential directors and sponsors to return calls while I compiled long mailing lists of potential benefactors from the corporate and individual donor lists printed in the house programmes of existing arts groups. Photocopying posters and programmes; designing cabaret posters; designing, copying and cutting the weekly cabaret hand bill; and writing programme content all fell to me. Where I needed guidance in what to do about this impossible situation, I did not know where to turn.

I had wanted a business advisor or mentor, someone who would volunteer to help me understand the situations that came up, preparations for various activities, advice on the basic elements of management, including finances, marketing, personnel, and the intangible of being in charge: encouraging confidence in others, while finding associates and delegating responsibility.

This mentoring never happened, and I can't but think that the year would have been easier with such a person with whom I could have had a regular and

detailed interaction. From the recent arts marketing text book, Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts (1997), I took the idea of creating an advisory panel of professionals who would volunteer their time and expertise without becoming board members or necessarily providing monetary donations (Kotler and Scheff).

But in the few attempts I made at a management mentor, I came up dry. First, I thought of David Bond, who was an economist with the Hongkong Bank of Canada. We arranged lunch in August. I knew his children from high school, and knew he had an interest in the arts and arts management. He did not volunteer himself or (as I had hoped) someone from the bank to act as a guide and critic of my management work which could begin with criticism of my business plan. I was particularly frustrated that if we had been a small business and taken out a small loan, our loans officer would have had a keen interest in the business plan and the development of the business. If I had taken out a \$3,000 loan against my car to create a for-profit opera company, with me as sole proprietor, the assistance would have been available.

Instead, David volunteered his wife, Diane, who had a background in business and the arts and who had been a manager of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. She was not available to speak with me until October and though her ideas and advice were thoughtful and provocative, it was clear this was a one-time only meeting. David did not, subsequently, respond to any of my occasional notes asking for a casual lunch. And neither he nor Diane ever responded to an invitation to a performance, let alone attend. For an outspoken critic of arts funding in Canada, his lack of interest in a small company attempting to use some of his ideas about the

responsibilities of the arts to raise money and find an audience was surprising and disappointing.

By this point, I figured I had run out of time looking for a mentor in the business sector, things were happening, meetings were occurring, and I was making decisions in consultation with Mari and Emma. It was not until late in the year that I realized the board itself was open to discussions and advising, and that meeting with the board and participating in a group discussion of how to address this or that challenge produced reasonable and manageable solutions.

In part, I expected very little from the board, believing they had lent their names as favours and not out of real interest in company management. I was wrong. But secondly, I was flying on a wave of such enormous (and misplaced) self-confidence of how easy this would all be, that I really didn't have the patience to look very far for advice. I was very secure in my ability to run this small organization, having for so many years watched other small arts organizations operate.

My most fundamental problem became apparent quickly: there was too much work to do. My business plan was over-ambitious. When Peter Loeffler expressed this, I took it as a kind of compliment, rather than realistic assessment. But he was right: there was too much to undertake in a first season.

This is a vital point. A first season cannot be all that the company wants to be, but I had a notion that we had to do it all, and that we could. I now think (and this is really common sense) that the challenge of the first season is to produce the main element of the company (a short opera) and to do that very well with as many audience members as possible, and without incurring debt.

This is how a company establishes artistic and financial credibility, and

growth potential. Volunteers, financial supporters, and loyal audiences are all potential products of a successful first season. Established quality and financial responsibility are also essential to the success of grant applications for which a company becomes eligible only after the first year of operations. Grant money, especially from government agencies (regardless of the amount), lends additional artistic credibility to an organization. Exactly how all of this is to be established without any funding assistance from an arts funding body is one of those absurdities of Canada's confused arts funding systems. Between grant ineligibility, the long wait for Revenue Canada to process the charitable status number that makes a company eligible for private grants and encourages individual and corporate giving, and the B.C. Government's own casino-money-to-charities scheme that requires a society to operate visibly for one year, the effect is primarily destructive. The system is clearly (if unintentionally) geared to discourage the existence of new companies.

Added to this Catch-22 situation is a fundamental element by which a new company's professionalism and artistic validity is judged: interest of established artists in the new company's work, as revealed by these artists' participation in the artistic product. Almost all such artists are members of an artists' union that requires hundreds, even thousands of dollars be paid to their members, in advance, for their work. This absurd conflict between the funders and artists' unions (which demand minimum payment) means it matters not how interested an established artist is in your work, they cannot perform with you. And this, the funding agencies regard as a lack of interest by established professionals.

While I never anticipated receiving any grant money in the first season, the discouraging truth of the system itself came as a surprise. I planned for a busy first season of a wide variety of performances, some fund-raising performances, others

subsidized by those performances. My vision was grandiose, especially in August when I drew up the first prospectus. Elements of this prospectus remained in the budget until reality really set in in January. On the positive side, I do not think the grandiose plan hurt the company. In fact, sometimes I think planning too much (and cancelling the impossible long before it had cost money) kept the year exciting. That is, the time between August and the productions, which occurred (after internal postponements) in late May, was long. The pursuit of other company projects (which I will list in a moment) allowed me to think more short term than to look ahead nine months to the operas.

On the other hand, the sheer number of ideas, and the work that each would have involved, was so enormous that it contributed, in part, to the stress and depression that eventually forced me to limit and then, for six weeks, stop work with the company. Volume of work, is, I understand, the misjudgment that closes many small businesses in the first year. Here is one of my task lists:

To call: Monday, November 24th

1. Floyd St. Clair re: meeting (9:30?)
2. Donna at Bell Canada
3. Royce Frith
4. Orca Bay person (message)
5. Christopher Gaze
6. Judith Forst re: press release
7. Nicola Cavendish re: hosting
8. Valerie re: video
9. BC Touring Council: re video
10. Gilles re: Comedy Festival [Montreal]
11. Equity re: meeting
12. Pick up casino form
13. Bob Eberle re: programme for Jan. [not Opera Breve related]
14. Sue Harvey re: drop off for meeting Tuesday pm
15. John Wright re: meeting Wednesday
16. Put together [conference] budget for Errol Durbach

17. Robson St. Merchants, Gay and Lesbian Merchants, Downtown Van Merchants Assoc.
18. Chris Gaze re: Dec. 5 party, auction, entertainment
19. Letters to new members
20. Christmas advertisement and poster info and budget
21. Sound equipment due Wednesday or renewed (more speakers?).
22. Judy Schmidt (Vancouver Sun) and Steve Newton (Georgia Straight) about listings
23. Gareth about christmas party Dec. 5 (can we perform something?)
24. Nathan about meeting Tuesday, rehearsal for his song, and Dec. 1 party at Bridges (and other parties too)
25. Egg Marketing Board about omelette and Bizet sponsorship
26. Mireille about new folder with information about company for sponsors, and folder for media.
27. Vivian Fung or other about getting some show shots.
28. Shirley Chan at UBC/etc.

Notice Chris Gaze is mentioned twice, an indication of the haste with which such lists were compiled. I would run through my brain, trying to think of all the things that needed to be done. Sometimes, a good way to organize yourself is to make a list of tasks, so that you may go through them in an orderly way and feel a sense of accomplishment as the list items are checked off. I do not recall how many of these items were checked off. Not many, and none that would have actually completed a task.

The "First Draft Prospectus," dated Aug. 7, 1997 (see Appendix II) includes a description of how three operas, Francis Poulenc's La Voix humaine (The Human Voice), Georges Bizet's Le Docteur miracle (Doctor Miracle) and Samuel Barber's A Hand of Bridge will be presented. It calls for performances in November, at UBC,

and again in March at "our venue, which we intend to be a hotel salon, with seating for 100 - 150"

It goes on: "The second weekend [of the March run] will be built around a festival/seminar/lecture/listening event (with other groups) on Poulenc and Cocteau, both of whom died in 1963, making 1998 the 35th anniversary of their deaths."

I imagine asking a CD store to open a small table with appropriate CDs for sale at each performance, and maybe set up such a table, worked by Opera Breve volunteers, in the Vancouver Opera lobby also.

Reference is made to finding a cabaret venue, where a monthly fund-raiser (perhaps drawn from a cover charge) would go straight to Opera Breve. I imagine this will earn the company \$500 each month. The performances and other cabaret costs, I anticipate, will be donated. I imagine numerous volunteers to assist with set-up, accompaniment, publicity, design, and posterings, and I imagine donated printing costs for all Opera Breve activities.

I go on to imagine a summer tour of the province "to be arranged in January" with day outings "as far as Kelowna and Kamloops," and I presume the costs of travelling, at least, will be covered by the "festival" that invites us, or "underwritten by a province-wide corporation, like Alcan, MacBlo, Fletcher Challenge"

High ideals are good, even essential, when they indicate the long-term (even second season) intentions of the company. But there is no substitute for producing the product for the first time.

Along with an over-ambitious undertaking, I lacked many of the skills that would have been a great help. I went into the project with a sense of my great ability to attract media attention. I was wrong, or over-confident of this ability. And the

work and organization required to properly approach media, which perhaps ought to have been the main (almost sole) focus of my work, was never seriously (see Marketing, Chapter VII).

I devoted enormous time to looking for corporate sponsors, an effort that proved mostly futile given that corporate money is usually ear-marked a year ahead of time, that Opera Breve did not yet exist except in the imaginations of a few of us, and that the process of arranging and attending meetings with potential sponsors was much more time-consuming than I had ever imagined. I found myself trapped inside my apartment, awaiting returned phone calls to arrange a meeting that would then consume an entire morning or afternoon, including parking and small talk. I was unprepared for that. And very little came of any of it.

But the single largest contribution to the company was the corporate sponsorship of Listel Vancouver Hotel and its restaurant, O'Doul's Restaurant and Bar, on Vancouver's Robson Street. The high traffic street is the centre of Vancouver's tourist area, with high-end fashion shops and restaurants. It is also on the edge of the high-density residential area, the West End. The hotel's season-long support, which culminated in the provision of an ideal performance space, a dressing room/hotel room, and servers to take orders for beverages and desserts, was a great vote of confidence, and a real boost to the company as we discovered, slowly, our identity. The value of Listel's in-kind sponsorship was by far the single largest contribution to Opera Breve: at least one-quarter of the season's budget.

To that must be added the personal support of Lise Magee, then-director of sales for Listel (director of public relations since October 1998) and a long-time friend. Lise's enthusiasm for our work, and for our place at Listel, were frequently morale boosts to me as the undertaking progressed. In the restaurant, manager

Calvin DesChenes was equally supportive of the cabaret. Hotel and restaurant staff were always helpful, friendly, and made us feel a part of their work environment, rather than an outside enterprise. Listel's early decision, by October, to support Opera Breve provided us the invaluable sense of concrete existence, the resolution to what might have been a long search for an appropriate and affordable venue, and the opportunity establish a public image that drew on the hotel's own image of stability and sophistication.

I had hoped to increase management staff and to delegate responsibilities, but this proved extremely difficult in both areas. In recruitment, two people in particular stepped forward to undertake work that was not based on a fundamental desire to perform in an opera. Recruiting volunteers was another area of which I had no understanding and sought no advice. I discuss some of the recruitment difficulties in Personnel (Chapter VIII). Time was passing quickly, and much of the financial and marketing plans were not being accomplished. Performances were always approaching. I had felt enormous confidence and ambition in August and September, but by October that had been replaced by a forced-confidence, and daily sense of failure. Managing became a struggle for motivation within a cloud of frustration and worry.

I never doubted that the operas would be produced. I believed we had the money and the production elements in place. But I did worry about audience, about marketing, about little things getting done. I also worried that without my staying on top of the artistic area, important decisions and deadlines might be forgotten or simply ignored. In my own sense of panic and frustration, I became frozen. I could not delegate. I could not clearly conceive of a specific task that would be independent of me, long-term, and allow Lee Plested (marketing) or Mireille Rijavec (publicity)

the chance to fully undertake a management project without my interference.

I also had trouble trusting anyone other than myself, a sure sign of managerial disaster. Although I felt little was being accomplished, I continued to hold tight to all of my responsibilities. I was incapable of relinquishing all responsibility for administrative function. Although Lee and Mireille were enthusiastic to undertake responsibility for publicity and marketing, respectively, I never actually let those tasks out of my sight. I hovered and second-guessed them, thereby revealing a fundamental mistrust of them, and refusing them the opportunity to have a real job in which they could set priorities and take pride in accomplishments. That I was not able to properly respect my colleagues was a serious personal weakness.

So overwhelmed was I with tasks, no matter how much I accomplished in a day, it was not enough. Every day felt like a failure. I developed silent anger against those I felt were not helping enough, were not doing their jobs, were leaving things for me to do, or at least operated on the understanding that whatever they could not complete, or even begin, could fall to me. In some cases my frustration was justified, in most cases not. But I endured the feelings, rarely (if ever) expressing them, and then only privately and in confidence to a third party. I was never honest with myself that this ongoing experience of failure and resentment was taking a toll on my self-esteem.

The emotional price I paid for internalizing anger and frustration was high. It added to the real pressures of Opera Breve, and became an element of the stresses that eventually turned the company into a kind of poison to me. By December, I was already responding to any mention of Opera Breve with anxiety and self-loathing. This would flourish, in conjunction with my natural inclination to

depression, into a period during which any thought of Opera Breve connected directly to a feeling of overwhelming personal failure.

It is ironic that I was afraid that should a core executive or board member quit, the company would be destroyed. In the end, I left the company, with a depressive illness, and actually quit entirely at the end of March and had no further contact with the company for more than a month. In a telephone message to Mari and Donna Wong-Juliani, I was as clear as possible that I was no longer a part of Opera Breve: they must treat me as if I had died. I would not return phone calls, I would not take phone calls, and I certainly would undertake no work on behalf of the company. I considered this vital to dealing with my depression, and I was right. The alleviation of stress took several days, but I did come to realize the company was gone now. There was disappointment, but less pain.

My depression became serious in late December, and became steadily worse through January where it settled into a terrible daily ordeal. With the success of a new medication in the third week of May, I was able to undertake some activity for Opera Breve over the final two weekends of the season.

In December, I began to withdraw from management tasks. I sensed the oncoming illness, and asked Donna Wong-Juliani if she would assist me with meetings and other managerial tasks. Graciously, she agreed without hesitation. Over the next several weeks, as I disappeared more and more into days of silence in which I did not return phone calls or undertake the tasks expected of me, Donna Wong-Juliani began to take over all responsibilities. I would resurface occasionally, do a bit of work, promise to do more, and promptly discover, despite my intentions, that I could not do anything. My phone calls to Donna, once again telling her that a task I had promised to undertake would not be done, were a regular embarrassment

and disappointment for me, and surely wreaked a kind of havoc for Donna, who had fallen into the middle of an outrageously over-taxed managerial role. Her work, paring the tasks and focussing on the possible, was air-clearing for the company, and a great education for me.

Finally, I do believe that a small business mentality is a vital way to embark on an art organization. But I do have two questions about this approach. First, I wonder if a business manager should be part of the organization in its first season. Perhaps an organization needs to begin with artists presenting their art, and handling all the elements of publicity and fund-raising (as necessary) themselves. It might make for a less expensive production in a less desirable venue (though not necessarily), but the focus of the entire organization could then be established, with proper attention on the artistic director as the organization's leader, the artistic visionary. An even better situation would be for an individual, not an artist, to market the company and its single production. With little time devoted to free listings and postering (broadcasting), every new group should look to instant audiences in the form of group sales to social organizations, ethnic organizations, neighbouring businesses, clubs, sports teams, perhaps school groups, acting classes, French classes, whatever. This very focussed marketing/sales work will not only result in sales of several tickets at once, but it establishes a personal relationship with a group that may then take an active interest in the new company's future.

Second, and it relates to the first question, I wonder if a non-artistic leader or co-leader (in this case, myself) creates both a confusion of leadership within the organization, and a generally-held belief that all tasks and responsibilities may ultimately fall to him or her. I believe I created a sense that everything would get done, if by nobody else, then by me. I did this on purpose, without realizing the

consequences, in order to establish the company as solid. I wanted my confidence to encourage confidence. But it created dependence.

A manager who is not an artist is, I believe, essential to establishing a company. An administrative leader is essential but that leadership needs to be just that: leadership within the larger group, not a solo act. That requires a trust of others, and quality of ego that allows others to undertake independent administrative work. But administrative focus must not be that which I chose: corporate fund-raising. Marketing is the most essential element to managing any new product: an opera or a toothpaste. With product quality left in the hands of the artistic director, selling this opera or that fund-raising performance is the vital managerial task. By the next season, management must expand into more areas, which requires more time or an additional manager.

Planned growth is essential to establishing a company.

The book, Standing Room Only, notes that

[i]t is difficult for small, founder-led, volunteer-run organizations to maintain that status for very long. After a while, the founder wants the security of a reasonable salary. The active volunteers want paid staff to take over many of their day-to-day activities ...

Small organizations that become artistically successful receive pressure from both the artists and the funders to expand. But expansion involves risks ... (Kotler and Scheff 416)

Those risks include the very existence of the organization. So expansion must be undertaken with care:

In the birth stage of an organization, the founders' emphasis is on creating, producing, and presenting their product. But as the organization grows, the founders find themselves burdened with unwanted management responsibilities. The increasing number of employees cannot be managed exclusively through informal communication ...

The organization grows more complex, with more ordered procedures for

accounting, fund-raising, and developing marketing strategies:

Some organizations fail at this stage. A charismatic leader or major funder may depart without providing for succession; the organization may fail to search for or find another person who can lead the organization into the next stage (420-421).

Certainly by the second season, the company needs a person who can undertake grant applications. Marketing must remain the primary managerial role. Perhaps a board member could undertake the grant applications. Additionally, a board of directors should be able to raise significant funds itself. Such a board, more volunteers, and an audience base are products of a successful first season.

CHAPTER IV: ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Opera Breve produced every cabaret performance to which it was committed, the Hors d'Oeuvre in November, a few private performances, and two one-act operas in May. With minor criticisms of some cabarets, all were well-produced and established the company as artistically valid and viable. Opera Breve should be very proud of this accomplishment.

That the journey was rough was probably to be expected. But it need not have been as rough and frustrating, had initial organizing and understanding among me, Emma, and Mari been better, and had that clarity been extended to the roles of Donna Falconer, as Music Director and Melissa Peabody as cabaret coordinator (the latter two undertaking these roles in January).

The company's artistic direction was an almost-constant series of crises that threw the artistic endeavour into question on more than one occasion. The situations were, I think, the product of a confusion of responsibility, personality

clash, and individual limitations.

Perhaps a season of frustration is essential to discovering the strengths and weaknesses of individuals, and learning individually what our individual roles really demand. In that sense, the heroic measures, undertaken by, at various times, Mari, Melissa, Donna, John Juliani, and Ron Fedoruk are a measure of first-season success.

The idea to assign the title of artistic director to both Mari and Emma was mine. The initial division of tasks was for each to be responsible for one opera production. The only shared task would be choosing the season. This arrangement quickly became unworkable. In part, this was due to the artistic role I undertook at the start, partly out of personal interest, and partly out of concern that vital artistic tasks were not being done.

Emma did not communicate much with me or with Mari during the summer of 1997, which she spent in Scotland. Mari and I met in August for the first time since the spring. I had thought Mari and Emma had chosen two operas and assigned roles before school ended in April, but this was not the case. When I met with Mari in August, no choices, let alone role assignments, had been made. What's more, Emma had suggested, by e-mail to Mari, a production of Semele, an oratorio rather than an opera, and Mari had compiled no list of potential operas.

I was, to say the least, frustrated that September was approaching and none of the "hundreds of operas" we talked about in the one-act category were even under consideration. I had been asking various people about one-acts during my summer travels, and many had been named, including several English one-acts (Benjamin Britten), and Poulenc's La Voix humaine.

Mari, it turned out, had been planning to perform La Voix humaine (The

Human Voice), a solo soprano drama based on the 1932 Cocteau play, in recital that academic year. She was pleased I named it, and said she would like to perform it. But we needed a second piece. So we, together, visited the Music Library where I pulled out the The New Grove Dictionary of Opera and started reading the first volume, looking for titles and composers. I hit Bizet, and a reference to an early one-act opera: Le Docteur miracle (Doctor Miracle). I looked that opera up in the same volume, and it sounded entertaining, with a cast of four. I showed it to Mari, who looked to see if the score was actually in the Music Library, which it was. Chosen.

That I chose the season was a running annoyance for me which would become greater as other artistic tasks fell to me or others.

When Emma arrived in early September, the two pieces had been chosen, and Semele had been shelved. This was to be a regular sore spot for her, for it seemed to make her feel like the second-class or adjunct artistic director.

With the titles chosen, and dates in November at the Chan Centre, both agreed there was not time to rehearse the Bizet opera, that we ought to present a night of excerpts instead. I found this frustrating, and began to realize Mari and Emma were looking at time frames in terms of the other commitments and the schedules of UBC voice students.

Mari and Emma chose the excerpts and performance pieces as follows:

"The Omelette Quartet"
from Georges Bizet's Doctor Miracle

"Wonderbar"
from Cole Porter's Kiss Me Kate

"The Language of Love"
from Franz von Suppé's Boccaccio

The Lady of Monte Carlo (5-minutes; full-length)
by Francis Poulenc, setting of a Jean Cocteau monologue

A Hand of Bridge (11 minutes; full-length)
by Samuel Barber/Gian Carlo Menotti

"The Champagne Trio"
from Johann Strauss's Die Fledermaus

The cast was Mari, Emma, Harout Markarian (a friend, and young tenor at the Academy of Music) and Andrew Greenwood (a friend, and baritone). Because I was aware of Vancouver directors and they were not, I undertook to find a director. I intended the choice of directors and designers to fall to me, in an artistic role that I felt I had a better knowledge of than Mari and Emma who knew few artists outside of UBC. Opera Breve's mandate also called for the use of directors and designers from outside the world of opera. I asked Valerie Methot, who had only graduated from the UBC Theatre Directing MFA a few months earlier, but whom I considered good with comic and with serious pieces. She agreed to undertake the project. I also arranged rehearsal space in the Theatre Department.

Meanwhile, Mari was suffering crisis stress in her attempts to find a pianist. No one wanted to work for free. This problem would persist over the course of the year: pianists did not want to undertake accompaniment/music direction because, for the most part, they were performance majors and accompaniment was irrelevant and time consuming. They wanted to be paid.

My suggestion of looking for pianists outside of UBC, people who had been out of school for a few (or many) years and who were more realistic about accompaniment as a worthwhile and enjoyable endeavour, went nowhere. This was my first hint that Mari was disinclined, even opposed, to seeking singers and pianists she did not actually know personally. Since this confined the pool of artists

to full-time UBC students, with a few additions, the company was left with a small group, almost all students. This despite the Opera Breve mandate to work with young local professionals and not appear part of the UBC School of Music.

With the arrival of Valerie to begin staging the Hors d'Oeuvre, Donna Falconer and Jocelyn Morlock, both of whom had agreed to accompany the singers in performance, undertook to share the rehearsal work also.

Emma, through the school at which she was teaching music in Langley, invited her colleague Carlene Wiebe to sing with the cabaret one night, and she quickly became a performer Mari and Emma looked to for cabaret performances, and with an eye to double-casting Doctor Miracle. Carlene was the kind of singer we ought to have sought more of.

I named the series of short pieces and excerpts An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre, to acknowledge its significance in providing audiences with an idea of the talent and production values of Opera Breve. We also wanted to invite audience members to the March operas.

In rehearsal, early on when there was no pianist, Emma undertook to play for music rehearsals. I had made several of my own phone calls to piano teachers looking for a pianist (which I considered outside of my area of knowledge, but all I was getting was crisis stress from Mari). Emma was herself growing frustrated, she would say, that no one seemed to be learning their music, and no one listened to her notes. She was trying to coach, and felt ignored.

This was, I learned, true. The other three performers did not want to be criticized by Emma, which defeated the whole idea of music rehearsals. That Emma was unable to command respect and establish a comfortable atmosphere in which her coaching was welcomed speaks to a lack of professional skill in that role. She

needed to earn respect and attention, but instead she felt entitled to them. Neither she nor Mari were taking much of a leadership role. Basic responsibilities were too frequently delegated to me when they decided the task had become impossible, but needed to be done.

I believe that two dynamics were occurring. The first was geography-based. Emma lived in New Westminster, at least a 30-minute drive from UBC which was the site of most meetings. She would be present at regular, scheduled meetings, but she was not present for the more casual meetings that Mari and I would arrange together on campus. This would take a toll on Emma, who felt increasingly alienated from us. I quickly began to regard Mari as the de facto artistic director, not just because of her physical presence, but also for her ability to speak with such composure and maturity at meetings with hotels and others. Emma was often not available or, on at least one occasion, embarrassingly late, for such meetings. She seemed not to understand the importance of our presenting the company in a fully professional manner. Emma's general casualness, I learned, was the product of her not sharing my and Mari's vision of Opera Breve. Emma saw a group of friends arranging to put on shows for fun, for chances to sing for audiences. The corporate element, the organizational meetings and discussions of image and company profile, struck her as a boring, unnecessary diversions.

Her focus on performing, and performing as much as possible, actually represented a very active, singer-focussed enthusiasm that for many of us had been replaced by the mundane essentials of business. Although management and organization were more important than Emma allowed, her artistic focus, and her inclination to organize singers, rehearsals, and book performances at seniors' homes revealed some artistic leadership. Neither I, nor the others, welcomed it.

Additionally, I think that just as I grew overwhelmed with the responsibility I had undertaken, Mari too began to feel like there was too much to do, not enough time, not enough help. Neither of us was used to asking people to work for us, to give us money, to join our "club," and the result was a kind of defeatist frustration in Mari that played badly against my already-sinking feelings.

The general auditions, held Sept. 27, were conceived poorly. Most of those auditioning were women, and the general sense was that these auditions were for operas. But of the two operas, two of the three female roles were clearly cast (Mari and Emma). With the singers realizing the only opportunities really available this season were volunteer performances at the O'Doul's cabaret, a kind of anger set in. Some singers mentioned to me their disappointment that they had gone to the trouble of auditioning when no roles were available. Additionally, two male roles did need to be cast, and the auditions that day did not present potential candidates. I did not know this at the time, but Mari and Emma both knew that casting a tenor and baritone for Doctor Miracle was a problem. Neither dealt with it. All roles would have to be cast soon, so that scores could be distributed, and music learned for rehearsals that would begin by late January.

Meanwhile, I was in search of directors. John Juliani had already agreed to direct the production of The Human Voice with Mari in solo performance. He and his wife, Donna Wong-Juliani, were enthusiastic and supportive members of our board. Their presence grew increasingly integral to our work as they provided essential knowledge-by-experience that we lacked.

I began to look for a director for Doctor Miracle, a person who ought to have a public profile he or she could lend to the company while pursuing a project he or she found challenging and interesting. My first, futile pursuit, was of Mina Shum,

the local filmmaker (Double Happiness, Drive, She Said) I had known years before at UBC. She sent messages of regret through assistants-to-Miss-Shum. I was surprised at the rudeness and apparent arrogance.

I began to court Christopher Gaze, of the Bard on the Beach Shakespeare Festival, to direct. The singers would have a unique experience, the director would have a new experience, and the company would benefit from the profile of the director. Chris, I thought, would be good with a broad comedy that he could fill with stage business. But he would not provide an answer for months. He came to see our performances in November and expressed pleasure with what he had seen, but still wanted to "talk." Meanwhile, I also delivered a copy of the script to Jay Ono of TheatreSports, who I also thought would be a good director of the piece. I did not follow up properly with Jay, and Chris finally declined at the end of November. With only two months before rehearsals were to begin, I was deeply disappointed, and annoyed that his indecision. I should have had a clear back-up, or offered the spot to someone else and tell Chris he had taken too long. In retrospect, I appreciate he was being asked to attach his name to the work of an untried company. Perhaps this made him hesitant. But so much was already in place: a venue, a board of directors, almost all of whom he knew personally, I cannot see such personal concern as valid. He had nothing to risk but to be seen as supportive of a new opera company.

John and Donna suggested that I approach Kico Gonzalez-Risso, their friend and a longtime Vancouver director, and someone they considered appropriate for the piece. I appreciated and respected their thought, so arranged to provide a score for him to read. Mari and I met with him in January, and he expressed interest, asked some questions, and he seemed to be the right person.

Back to October, where Valerie's rehearsal schedule for the Hors d'Oeuvre was intensive and long. It was more time-consuming than Mari or others had anticipated. Valerie, whose background was in theatre, devoted considerable time to non-musical rehearsals, where character was explored, including motivations and movement. This proved popular with the singers, initially. Character work and acting were elements of opera that we all considered an important element of our productions. But this added to the amount of rehearsal to which the singers were accustomed. Mari told me she thought Valerie's rehearsal schedule too onerous, and wondered if I would mention this to her. I told her speaking with the director about her artistic approach was up to her and Emma. The rehearsals continued, as did Mari's and Emma's silent annoyance.

The shows went up, and went well. Audiences were fine (about 80 for each of the two performances), and it seemed that everybody involved in production had had a good experience.

In the late November period, Emma undertook, with my and the executive's awareness and my enthusiasm, to book the company into several seniors' homes for December and January. The bookings were for a pianist and two singers for a rate of \$150 or more. I liked the idea of more paid performance work for singers, and advertising opportunities for Opera Breve. I was also pleased and impressed that Emma had undertaken this independent work of booking dates and arranging performers. I had been unable for months to delegate a managerial task to her, despite her frequent requests for work that she could undertake, given she had all of her mornings free.

The regular Tuesday meetings at Mari's house now included, in addition to me, Mari and Emma, Mireille Rijavec (as publicist) and Lee Plested (as marketing

director). The Julianis were often present, and Phil Grant, a UBC voice student with a background in marketing, would sit in and offer suggestions. Phil's awareness of marketing technique was encouraging, but it also constantly revealed how little planning had been done, and how much time was lost by failure of organization--not lack of money--to undertake simple marketing techniques. These meetings were open discussions, where anyone could speak to any topic, following a rough agenda.

At a meeting in December, the question of the seniors' homes dates came up as a point of discussion. It also happened to be a day when Emma would be unable to stay for the whole meeting. Emma's lateness for meetings and rehearsals, and days like this one where she would be unable to stay for the entire meeting, had become a frustrating pattern. Accompanied by Emma's frequent expressions of her own unhappiness, the general attitude towards Emma had grown negative, and this negativity was the subtext of the subsequent discussion that day. The issue of the seniors' homes was way down the agenda, and would not be discussed until after Emma's departure.

When the item came up, the thoughts expressed were entirely negative: This was not work for a professional opera company, we should be looking for bookings at corporate parties, not seniors' homes, these homes were way out in the Fraser Valley and it would be difficult to find people to do the performances for \$50 each (which would leave nothing for Opera Breve), and that this simply was a negative activity for it would imply Opera Breve was an amateur organization. Opera Breve was too good and professional to reduce itself to entertaining at seniors' homes.

And so we decided that all of the performances she had booked on her own initiative, with company support, were to be abandoned. We decided instead, that we would offer these bookings to Nancy for the UBC Opera Ensemble to do. This,

we thought, would not only be a generous offer to Nancy, which would surely win her waning support for Opera Breve, and the Ensemble could take Opera Breve brochures along, or even take Emma along to speak briefly about Opera Breve, and its commitment to young artists: i.e. UBC voice students.

In retrospect, this was an arrogant, unreasonable decision that had us throw away an important artistic and marketing vehicle.

When I informed Emma of the decision later in the day, she was furious. She had done so much work, she was not appreciated, she didn't know why she had devoted so much time, etc. The dates would not be turned over to Nancy, she said. They were her dates. She would organize the performances herself. She quit Opera Breve, and did not know if she would even perform the cabaret that Sunday, Dec. 14, for which she was scheduled. She changed her mind about performing, and did perform that Christmas concert. After the concert, she and Mari and I went together to a restaurant and made an amicable break that meant Emma would continue to perform with Opera Breve.

It had seemed inevitable for some time that Emma would go. She was so frequently frustrated with the company, with the direction it was taking, with a focus not on singing and rehearsing shows, but on paper work and long meetings about bureaucratic elements.

I think she had a point, though I also think a personality clash made it difficult for Emma to work a part of this "team." I did often feel that Emma needed constant praise for her work. Egos needed to go without stroking, despite amounts of work and successes. We were really fumbling along, dealing with our emotional needs in an area of work with which none of us were familiar. But Emma had a sense that we were all talk and no action. She was right, in a sense. The amount of

effort going into any Opera Breve performance was enormous, the discussions often endless, and all the design, postering, fund-raising schemes, and general planning was consuming too much time. At least, I think, too much of her and Mari's time.

The low level of real artistic initiative, the drive to go out and get singers and put on a show, to court artists rather than ask favours of them, was encouraged by the administrative morass into which I wanted everyone consumed. In retrospect (as mentioned earlier) Emma's undertaking with the seniors' homes was an independent initiative that revealed an impulse to leave management alone and undertake real artistic leadership. While her casual demeanour was often inappropriate, and her inability to win the respect of her former classmates in her coaching attempts virtually guaranteed Emma's frustration and departure, the ease with which the company destroyed artistic initiative remains a lesson. Opera Breve was an organization so self-involved with getting everything just right, we created a mass of bureaucratic imperatives that suppressed the vitality and sheer joy of actually making art.

Elements of preparing our major productions, which required organization and perseverance, and which were essential to producing the operas, appeared to produce so much anxiety for Mari, that her inclination was often to avoid these responsibilities altogether. In particular, she revealed in January that she had no tenor for Doctor Miracle, despite that fact that the cast ought to have been learning their music at that point. I asked if she had phoned the numerous voice teachers and choir directors, a group of names we had gone over, and she said no. I was astonished and frustrated. This tenor-crisis, which would force cancellation of the production, led to an emergency meeting in Nancy's office with me, Nancy, Mari, and John.

Mari basically threw herself on Nancy's mercy, asking Nancy if she could do anything to assign a student to the production. This panic to cast anyone was frustrating and upsetting to me. I could not get past how little Mari had to do, and that still this basic artistic function had not been performed. Two tenors, names Mari had gotten from a friend, were tied up with the Vancouver Opera Chorus. Only singers with the opera chorus at UBC, it seemed, were left. My suggestion that we hold a day of auditions the following week was dismissed. Mari had no time for a day of auditions.

This was not my first realization that Mari, doing full-time courses at UBC, had almost no time for the organizational work of an artistic director. As an artist, she was prompt and prepared for rehearsals, she could learn a role with haste, and she performed beautifully. But there was really no point in her week when she could wait for a phone call to be returned. Still, she often volunteered to rehearse and perform with various UBC ensembles and as part of the recitals of other UBC students. To me, this time felt misused, given the small amount of time she was able to devote to organizing artistic elements for the upcoming Opera Breve productions.

Additionally, Nancy, in her general reluctance to give Mari any breaks, any "non-availability" dates for opera rehearsals, and her general requirement that Opera Breve not interfere in any way with Mari (or anyone else's) school time, was surprisingly non-supportive. Instead of crediting Mari for her Opera Breve initiative (which I had assumed she would do), Nancy seemed to require Mari behave as if the company did not exist. While other students received time off for chorus work in out-of-school productions, even in other cities, somehow, Mari was ineligible.

Indeed, Nancy's interest in the company declined rapidly to the point where I grew to feel she felt competitive with the company, rather than supportive. She never appeared at board meetings, and did not actively help in even small ways, such as contacting Judith Forst for us and asking her to lend her name to our company. In the end, it was Lee who called Forst on the phone to ask her to be an honorary board member, to which she immediately agreed. In the early days, Nancy told me she believed Opera Breve could potentially become a significant company to which UBC voice graduates could look for a professional experience, and she was also interested in the possibility of a regular relationship whereby one of her students could perform with Opera Breve for Opera Performance credit, which would save Opera Breve one singer's wage, and allow Opera Breve to boast an important relationship to UBC Opera in the area of professional development of singers. Such enthusiasm was short-lived. Soon, Nancy became avoidant. I remain confused at this drastic shift.

Finally, it was John, that tenor-Tuesday, who prevailed, and recommended putting the March productions off until a better time. Discussion settled on the last two weeks of May, following the final performance of the Vancouver Opera's The Barber of Seville. This would open up the availability of those two tenors. It also meant that Bremner Duthie would not be available for the baritone role of the father. A new baritone would now need to be found.

Later that week, Mari asked me to contact the two potential tenors and ask if they were available. I called Adam Kozak first and he said he was available and interested. I passed this news to Mari, who cast him immediately, without ever having heard him sing.

My suggestion to audition baritones for the role of the father in Doctor

Miracle, and gather names by calling voice schools, voice teachers and choir leaders was ignored. Instead, the role was offered to a UBC voice student who was very young. I cringed at the miscasting that would look like a typical college show, with singers much too young taking the roles of parents.

Fortunately, he chose to decline the offer, which allowed Andy Greenwood, who had become available, to take the role. Another dodged bullet in the casting department, but the attitude towards casting left me an unpleasant feeling.

Also absent was a second pianist. Donna Falconer had undertaken the task of accompanist with The Human Voice, which had begun rehearsals. But there was no second pianist. Once again, I was asked to find a pianist. I spoke with a friend of a friend, Thierry Gutel, who had volunteered to work with the company back in November. He agreed to work with the Bizet, and I sent him the score.

But between January and the end of February, there was no contact with the performers or Thierry or Kico. Not even to tell them of the date change to May. When I suggested in February that a meeting was overdue, it was Melissa (in the mezzo role of Doctor Miracle, and by now the cabaret coordinator) who undertook to arrange a meeting at Mireille's apartment. This was the first opportunity, less than a month before rehearsals ought to begin, that any attempt to create a rehearsal schedule was undertaken. It was late in the game, and the resulting conflicts in the schedule created some impossible conflicts that could have been known a month earlier. Mari was unable to attend the meeting.

With no production manager, or stage manager, the impetus for such a meeting had fallen through the cracks of responsibilities. It looked now like an impossible situation, with Thierry's schedule in total conflict with that of Andy and Adam, both of whom were in rehearsal for The Barber of Seville.

Finally, I received a frantic call from Melissa that Thierry had announced he could no longer wait for confirmation of the a rehearsal schedule, because he was receiving offers of work for March and April that he could not turn down.

This frantic moment should have belonged to Mari. Instead, I assured Melissa it was fine that Thierry had pulled out. We would find another pianist, and that would be up to Donna Falconer, who was now the company's Music Director. Again, in crisis, it came down to a last-minute plea, and Mari managed to get her regular pianist, Sonia Kim, to undertake the Poulenc, with Donna Falconer agreeing to work on the Bizet.

All worked out, though the rehearsal schedule for the Bizet was very difficult, and it was almost impossible for the four performers to be together at the same time. A week before opening, anxiety abounded that the show would not be ready. Last minute, intensive rehearsals, with the help of John Juliani, put the finishing touches on the show which was just fine. A broad comedy with stock characters, Kico had worked well incorporating standard farce elements like visual jokes and comic timing into the production. Performers used well-rehearsed "takes" in their facial responses to information and events.

The fall-out from Doctor Miracle rehearsals created more defeatism in Mari. She considered it to have been a catastrophe, and could not (it seemed) conceive of how to avoid such conflicts and poor organization in the future. She spoke as if casting was impossible, somehow, given that you can never know if a cast will have conflicting schedules.

As the second part of the year unfolded, I found Mari increasingly disinclined to choose any operas for the second season. She complained that she had no idea if anyone was available, and that there were simply no tenors. that she didn't know

who was available, or that there weren't any tenors.

I also grew increasingly annoyed that the company's mandate to take works from the international repertoire, including works by well-known composers or operatic versions of well-known stories, was being ignored. This seemed to be the unfortunate result of my acquiring a copy of the new book, Operas in One Act (1996) by W. Franklin Summers. This listing of one-act operas, with detailed notes on required voices, availability of the score, and the difficulty of each role, is very good and surely very useful to some. But it is of limited use to Opera Breve. The volume makes little attempt to include works written in languages other than English, and most (if not all) entries are for twentieth-century compositions. Mari's pool of potential productions drew from this book, and from a short list of one-act operas she or a friend had seen or performed.

In January, a great opportunity arose when June Goldsmith, artistic director of Music in the Morning, invited Opera Breve to perform a one-hour work on her main season and to perform a short Viennese operetta at her company's Viennese Evening in January 1999. For her regular season, she had asked Opera Breve to perform Gian Carlo Menotti's The Telephone (an English-language piece), to which Mari added Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's The Secret of Susanna (an Italian piece frequently produced by university opera programs). This generous act of confidence and support of our young company provided Opera Breve with more self-assuredness that our mandate was sound, our production quality high. The double-bill is scheduled for May 1999.

For the January 1999 Vienna-themed event, June asked for something by Strauss. Mari told me that she and Donna Wong-Juliani had had a meeting with June, at which Mari had told June there were no short Strauss operettas, and that

she had suggested a Mozart piece instead, though it did not fulfil the period style intended for the weekend event. June had responded that she and Floyd St. Clair (an opera critic who has been very supportive of Opera Breve) would consider the Mozart, and try to suggest something more appropriate.

I was frustrated and embarrassed. To respond to the offer of a performance with no appropriate ideas seemed a good way to lose the opportunity. But I said nothing. I did accompany Mari to the library soon thereafter, and in about 20-minutes, after looking up "Vienna" in the New Grove Dictionary of Opera, had the names of numerous short-opera composers, and some titles, all of which would be appropriate for the Vienna-themed event. I looked up one title, and the opera sounded light and funny, with a small cast. I photocopied the entire "Vienna" citation, and the citation for the specific opera. I gave the package to Mari, who noted the opera sounded interesting. My hint, however, that use of the library can provide numerous possibilities, was not taken.

Months later, I learned Opera Breve had chosen not to perform on that January program because Mari and Donna Wong-Juliani had determined the amount of money offered by Music in the Morning would not cover the expenses of producing a short opera. The amount offered struck me as quite enough, though not high, and the opportunity for the company was priceless. Mari also believed January was a difficult time to produce, since rehearsal would be required in December or earlier, when (she anticipated a year in advance) performers would not be available. Declining this opportunity to present the company, add to its repertoire, and sell upcoming performances struck me as remarkably short-sighted, and symptomatic of the company's lack of ambitious artistic leadership.

Mari and I had discussed the need to announce the 1998-99 season at the May

openings, but the only pieces she threw out for discussion were twentieth-century English-language operas from *That Book*. I began to regard *That Book* as an unwelcome crutch, for it made repertoire choice so easy. All pertinent information was right there. The book's severe limitations appeared not even worth Mari's consideration.

I would raise the names of other short operas, titles I had stumbled across, with casts of which I was uncertain and scores I had not, nor could not, read and judge. These were regularly met with single word dismissals calling the composer difficult, the casting difficult, the language foreign (despite any knowledge by either of us if a translation existed). I have asked myself if these dismissals were merely hurtful to my ego, and the product of my making suggestions where my knowledge was not required, or welcome. But I was surprised that so few operas were under consideration, especially if they fell outside of the current century. Surely, I thought, I could make suggestions.

I considered important that Opera Breve seasons include at least one opera with a title or composer or subject that would be immediately recognized by the audience. From the beginning, I was interested in the four-voice, turn-of-the-century, Spanish zarzuela version of La Bohème, Il Bohemio. I considered it worthy of consideration, but Mari had no interest.

The final such moment, for me, came towards the end of the May run. I had, by reading through an opera encyclopedia, discovered a two-voice opera for baritone and tenor, Mozart and Salieri. By Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, it was the first (or so claimed the encyclopedia) production that looked at the rumour that Salieri had been involved in the death of Mozart. I mentioned it to a few opera experts who described the opera as good. This seemed to me an outstanding choice, particularly

for a November/December 1998 production: costs would be low, and the title itself would gather interest.

Mari's response, score unseen, was that the composer was difficult, the libretto in Russian, and she had no idea what anyone's schedule was for December, which was just too soon to produce any kind of show. This discussion occurred in May, six months in advance of a Fall production. No second-season titles were announced in May. Had the company been able to provide that information to the May audiences on a two-sided flyer, interest might have been generated, and marketing thus begun, for the next season. Instead, patrons were asked for their addresses so that information could be sent them as soon as it became available.

I came to believe that Mari's negativity was still the product of long, difficult year where work had been overwhelming, difficult episodes had created a sense of futility, and the idea of producing anything now was terrifying. Despite the funding success that had allowed us to produce two operas, Mari was mistrustful of the company's ability to raise sufficient money. My assurances that a second season was a different thing, that production costs could be significantly lower with this show, that a grant of some kind could be forthcoming, could not dislodge the negativity and nervousness.

This was the light in which I departed the company in June, uncertain that Mari's confidence could be re-enlivened.

My own dream had been that with the end of the first season, Mari would find a co-artistic director with whom she worked well, who had experience in the role and the uncertainty of producing, and who could take some responsibility from Mari whose full-time school work created conflict. Fortunately, in June, Donna Wong-Juliani agreed to take on the role of executive director and John Juliani

agreed to act as co-artistic director. This had been the de facto situation for months, but her commitment to the company for its immediate future, along with the growth of a board of directors into a group with fund-raising capability and the motivation to do it, came as an assurance that the company would carry on.

With John as co-artistic director, I believed that decisions could be made in a calmer, more enthusiastic, more confident vein.

As artistic director, Mari's strengths proved considerable. She was able to deal well with the singers, artistically and politically, she cast the Bizet well, she could learn musical pieces quickly, and organize them quickly, as proven by a handful of private performances, and she could determine the difficulty of a piece of music and consider it in terms of potential singers.

As a public face for Opera Breve, Mari is outstanding as well. Charming, likable, and enormously talented, Mari can impress with her stylish, character-filled performance and with her enthusiastic, articulate presentation of Opera Breve to media, audience members, board members, donors, and prospective board members and donors. In radio interviews, Mari presents herself a poised, humour-filled artist, revealing a casual-elegance that reflects the company's chosen image.

As weakness, Mari seemed avoidant of researching operas, finding titles and pursuing scores or recordings for consideration. I would expect any artistic director to undertake this fundamental artistic task. She was always reticent to call strangers like choir directors and local voice teachers, in search of singers and to develop collegial relationships with her peers in the professional music community. I couldn't help but wonder if the tenor crisis in January, followed by the baritone crisis, couldn't have been resolved without the desperate "we'll use anyone" position that Mari took .

Perhaps it was my own constant sense of anxiety about the present and future, but I wanted Mari to be on top of texts, and her inclination to rely on word-of-mouth, her own experience, and That Book, for opera titles and opinions always struck me as too narrow. It also happened to become my greatest interest. While I was being avoidant of managerial responsibilities, and then reduced my role due to illness, I discovered my greatest interest was to discover the titles of infrequently produced short operas, mostly pre-twentieth-century.

My own music credentials being few, my suggestions could easily be dismissed, but I couldn't help but think my research was helpful.

The company grew closer to its performance dates, it was board members John, Donna and Ron Fedoruk who resolved the issue of sets, costume, and lighting design: Essential elements we had let slide. Designing a performance space in that room would be a great challenge, and no one had been engaged. Ron stepped in and provided a stunning transformation of the room. For lighting in a room with a relatively low ceiling, and to avoid the inelegance of theatre lights clamped to posts, he developed an ingenious solution. Floor-placed lights focussed on the ceiling mirror, thereby lighting the performance space (centered in the ballroom), with reflected light. Arrangement of chairs around small "coffee tables" created several intimate groupings. Donna, busy with contracts, printing posters, and publicity shots, found the time to purchase soft burgundy cloth with which to cover the hotel's used bedside tables, and transform them into small, inviting, "coffee tables". Each was hand-sewn to fit the tables.

The "salon" was central to the concept: intimacy, casualness, relaxation, beverages, and big voices. The design concept, including furniture and costumes that allowed Opera Breve to present fully -staged operas gave us and the audience a

chance to judge the artistic validity and viability of what had only been a promising idea. The reality was a more intimate, more exciting performance experience than I had even imagined.

CHAPTER V: THE CABARET

As mentioned, the original idea was for a monthly fund-raising cabaret that would provide regular contributions to the our opera production fund. I imagined a group of volunteer singers and pianists performing in a local music venue (we considered The Web Cafe, which closed about that time, The Chameleon, The Georgia Street Grill, and O'Doul's) as potential one-time venues.

Opera Breve would incur no costs, and take from a cover charge would make it relatively easy to raise between \$200 and \$500 a month. Thus the clear, single most important intention of an opera cabaret was as a regular monthly fund-raiser for Opera Breve. Early budgets anticipated hundreds of dollars monthly coming from the event.

In practice, the weekly cabaret consumed enormous amounts of planning time, and put stress on a company that was ill-prepared to come up with singers every week in a properly rehearsed performance. What money was raised went almost entirely to the singers. Opera Breve was receiving little cash benefit. The long-term success of the cabaret has become evident, including the company's name in the listings sections of newspapers every week, the opportunity to meet numerous singers, and the introduction of the company to a variety of supporters.

When Lise Magee called to say O'Doul's was interested in both of Opera

Breve's projects--a venue for the operas in the ballroom and a performance space for the cabaret in the restaurant--I was thrilled and nervous. The idea of performing every week suggested to me a different undertaking entirely, and I was not sure that a weekly show was possible.

We were already in rehearsal for a one-night Nov. 2 show, an audition for the restaurant/hotel which we would use as a fund-raiser. I had discussed with Mari what I considered the need for a director/choreographer, a person to oversee the production, to organize the performers and to provide guidance in a rehearsal/run-through. My suggestion was Shelley Stewart Hunt, a friend, stage musical performer, voice and dance teacher, and choreographer.

The first performance, Nov. 2, was a pastiche of the work of Shelley's friends and Mari's opera friends. There was no chemistry between Shelley and Mari, and Mari was galvanized to stage the cabarets herself, especially when the response of the hotel was that the show should be opera only. So Shelley departed, having done a good job with no guidance or clear idea what a confused Opera Breve wanted.

This was fine, but problems of various types ensued. One was rehearsal and comfort in performance. Many of the opera singers had never performed in an environment like this before, and almost none chose, or were offered, the chance to rehearse their songs on the Sunday afternoon before performance. This led to a lot of stand-still performances, which we had grown to regard as deathly in a performance space that did not allow many customers a clear view of the main performance space. Movement was essential, but often lacking.

But the greatest problem was casting for each Sunday. Emma and Mari had difficulty finding singers and a pianist who would commit to working the one-hour show, and to attend a one-hour rehearsal before the show. For the first two or three

shows, the payment went from a division of the hat-collection (which could be very low, less than \$10 each), to Opera Breve guaranteeing no less than \$10 for the performance. At the time, I regarded this as very little, but at least a token indicating the company's desire to pay performers a reasonable amount as soon as possible. By the end of January, we decided that the \$100/week from O'Doul's, which was intended for expenses and advertising, would instead be divided among the four artists (three singers and a pianist). This meant \$25 each, with the money raised through the "hat" going to Opera Breve, and providing some subsidy for that payment. We could raise less than \$50 some nights, but it evened out over the course of the year.

Still, it always seemed that on Wednesdays, Mari or Emma was still trying to convince this singer to sing or that pianist to play. And this meant the music would arrive late for the pianist, arias or songs would be learned at the last minute, and there was never time to prepare duets or trios.

Show quality often suffered. I did not understand why arrangements for a full month could not be made a month in advance, or why one group of performers could not be asked to perform the same show four consecutive Sundays, for \$100 each and only one rehearsal. But this is where the panic, and difficulty winning the interest of singers became a larger and larger problem. It always seemed that the singers were not interested in the performance opportunity to try new material, to sing for an audience, to invite family/friends/agents to hear them sing. Instead, everyone was doing a favour for Mari, which I always considered a bad thing.

Our commitment to a weekly cabaret required too many singers too regularly at a time the company was too young and small. Mari and Emma were both in rehearsal for the Hors d'Oeuvre, which opened Nov. 9, while simultaneously

rehearsing the first cabaret, Nov. 2 and planning the second cabaret, Nov. 9. There was no time to properly organize, no method designed to make an invitation to sing or play piano at a cabaret sufficiently attractive. The search for pianists was difficult, but by the end of November, Donna Falconer had become a regular presence, and in the new year we would ask her to be the company's music director, a way to recognize her great and ongoing contribution to the company.

With January, also, Melissa took over as cabaret coordinator. She had become angry when Mari told her that Doctor Miracle would not be double-cast, which meant she would not perform an opera. I had always been unclear on how a double cast would operate, since an additional four performers would not only dilute considerably the division of box office by which artists would be paid, but also seemed unnecessary given there would only be five or six performances. Mari and I never discussed her desire to include so many, but Kico told us in January that rehearsing two casts would be too time-consuming for him.

Melissa had performed a number of cabarets, and now felt, rightfully, short-changed. The slight was unintentional, one of those growing-pain ordeals for a new company, but a slight nonetheless. Mari and I had already discussed the need for an additional person to take charge of organizing the cabarets, and it was Mari who decided Melissa was the ideal choice. Her enthusiasm for cabaret performing, its history and traditional repertoire, was great. Ironically, within days of this new arrangement, it became clear that Emma could not be trusted to perform. Her frequent threats not to perform in the past, and her anger at that time, convinced me that casting Emma in the mezzo role of Doctor Miracle would only invite trouble. The executive agreed, and Mari offered the mezzo role to Melissa, who accepted.

The shift of cabaret organizing lifted a great responsibility from Mari. Melissa was better able to devote time to the mundane phone-calling to line up singers, in addition to arranging repertoire and rehearsals. Still, it was a weekly endeavour, with some weeks more frustrating than others. Melissa would often cast herself when she was a singer short, which worked well, and Mari would also sing occasionally, and in a pinch.

Melissa also organized well in advance for singers and pianists. But the programs without duets and trios continued. That kind of rehearsal for singers seemed beyond Melissa's organizational skills too, or perhaps there just wasn't enough money involved for anyone to make a four-Sunday commitment.

The cabarets were reduced to two per month in April and May, when the two operas were in rehearsal and production. They returned to the weekly schedule in July and August, but by then I had departed. Mari did a lot of singing in the summer. She worked up, or was able to perform, duets with a number of people, and this shifted the shape of the show as John Juliani became more involved with staging and hosting the performances.

But still, the cabaret is a money-losing or break-even effort that keeps the company in the public eye both in performance, and in newspaper listings. It is also a regular opportunity to show the company's work to potential sponsors and other supporters.

The nine- or 10-song programme, with a 10-minute intermission that has become the cabaret format, was originally designed to allow the performers to mingle with audience members during the break, chat with those who seemed to be paying attention to the performance, and establish a more congenial atmosphere for the second part of the show. We thought this would not only encourage audience

members to return, and to add their names to a mailing list, but to provide a gratuity when the show ended. This never worked. Singers weren't comfortable with mingling, there was little modelling of it by Mari or Emma, and so the break became just that: a break in the middle of a 45-minute performance when the singers and pianist gather and chat privately, aloof from the audience. This allows the audience, diners and bar patrons, to forget about the show, and see a convenient moment to leave the restaurant. A captive audience is freed.

I still think the audience interaction is a fine idea, but if the singers won't do it, there should be no break at all. It becomes counter-productive.

Also, we were wrong to try to collect gratuities subtly. At the start, it seemed inappropriately garish to pass a hat, or even mention money very much. We placed small envelopes on each table, and a programme of the evening's performance which included the suggestion that audience members show their appreciation by slipping a gratuity into this nondescript envelope. All quiet, low key, sophisticated. The cabaret host would remind members of the audience to consider slipping a gratuity into the envelope.

But that is not how gratuities work. When someone leaves a tip at a restaurant, that tip is for individual service. It is a personal response to personal service. The server asks if everything was satisfactory. He or she often has the opportunity to see the size of the gratuity, and to express their thanks directly.

Cabaret performers do not provide individual service and cannot expect the kind of response that such service encourages. In the absence of a cover charge, or payment in advance, a performer must be bold, as bold as a street performer. I suggest the host pass the hat. A clear plastic bowl appropriately decorated would be perfect. After the first two or three songs, the host can say, "Our performance tonight

is sponsored by you. Please be generous when the Opera Breve bowl reaches you. These are great young artists, and they need your support. It's a pleasure to perform, but no one can perform for free." By the end of song five or six, that bowl should be moving, so that everyone at each table, and at other tables, can see what other people are giving. No one wants to be embarrassed by dropping noisy coins when five-dollar bills have become the evening's norm. The bowl should begin its journey with a couple of fives, and maybe a ten, already placed.

During this second half of the uninterrupted performance, singers performing in and around tables should acknowledge the presence of the bowl, however briefly, with a smile or, depending on the singer, a visual question to one patron asking if they have contributed yet. Maybe a singer could simply help pass the bowl from one table to another without acknowledging it in any other way. And this doesn't have to be every singer. Some rehearsed business with the bowl could also be helpful, and entertaining.

Audience members should also be told, by the midway point, that another bowl (hold it aloft) "is located here, by the door, for those of you who must leave before the bowl reaches you." Arrange the bowl in sight of the main performance space, so the singer, pianist or host may acknowledge a contribution with a smile and a nod, if that is appropriate at that moment.

The cabaret itself can even consist of a five- or 10-show repertoire, with set programmes and music prepared for pianists and singers. Cabaret performances and concerts may be taken from this repertoire. A cabaret schedule may include four consecutive performances of the same programme. Singers could be provided with music well in advance, and simply fill a musical role already set. Of course, such programmes must be flexible, given the varying abilities and interests of individual

performers. But this basic repertoire of shows would provide the company with an easy way to put a cabaret together. Changing performers from one cabaret to the next, and shifting repertoires from performance to performance, takes more energy and organization than it ought to. A preconceived performance, rehearsed once, could run on consecutive dates, or a designated night once a month for three or four months. Replacing a singer or pianist for one or more performances would be relatively simple, given the piano and vocal scores for each of the prepared programmes are easily accessed. With that in mind, I think the rehearsal, especially with singers who know their music, should be held in the performance space in a mid-morning or mid-afternoon quiet period in the restaurant. Even Sunday afternoon. This allows new singers to learn the room, and allows performance to be more integrated into the space.

These prepared performances could be marketed not only for private functions, but they could be toured, potentially, to schools, and seniors' homes. For community performances, perhaps on a Lower Mainland or provincial tour, a truncated cabaret might precede an opera. Also, I recall an imaginative audience member who noted one night that a cabaret such as ours could be geared to performance on Vancouver Opera performance days, presenting a set at a restaurant near the Queen Elizabeth Theatre where opera audience members may gather after an opera performance. Many such restaurants are full before the show, but empty after. An opera cabaret, related somehow to the opera they have just seen, could draw after-show audiences to the restaurants. Advertised, by the restaurant, in the Vancouver Opera house programme, such an endeavour could be lucrative. No hat-passing.

CHAPTER VI: FINANCE

I had a fundamental misunderstanding of first-season realities. But I learned, slowly, that until you actually produce a show (in this case, a one-act opera), you exist only in your own imagination, speeches, written proposals, the hopes and dreams of those who share an enthusiasm for the concept. To most of the world, you do not exist: no show, no production history, no proof you can actually produce, and produce well. Despite my confidence that everything would work perfectly (I could not imagine anything going wrong), I was surprised that so few of those individuals and corporate representatives who received my cold-calls, followed by information packages, were willing to associate with Opera Breve.

After all that I had learned in the summer from Shaw Festival management about their corporate sponsorships, where the corporate sponsor received, in return for sponsorship, a public relationship with a significant and worthy arts institution, I did not appreciate fully the difference between an established festival and a new company.

In fact, so certain was I that the bulk of our funding would come from a handful of corporate sponsors who would treat the company as an advertising expense (for corporate logos on posters, in house programmes, etc.), that I let the application for a charitable status number from the federal government slide. I just did not see it as important to have the charitable status.

When it became clear in the new year that a tax receipt was an important document to offer all those who made donations of any size, it was too late for the first season. And without the charitable status, I believe the question of Opera Breve's level of professionalism was thrown into question.

Much as I hated the idea of becoming a charity, and the attitude I had so often seen accompany it (arts organizations begging for money), I failed to recognize the significance of offering tax receipts when people gave us money. The receipt itself, which reduced the donation by about one-third for the giver, had a more intangible significance: it said "professional arts organization" to the public. This, in addition to the provincial incorporation as a not-for-profit, and the need for validation by a government funding organization, are standard arts organization credentials which, however publicly misconstrued, are optical essentials for a company in pursuit of credibility. Opera Breve just didn't have the managerial and marketing leadership to buck the importance of these emblems.

It still frustrates me that a "peer jury" at either the provincial or Federal government levels must believe our endeavour artistically significant and valid before bestowing dollars, or, more importantly, a few dollars and the accompanying right to put that Canada Council insignia on posters and programmes and letterhead. Especially now, when government funds are so small and the criteria for granting has become bogged down in issues of "community" participation in professional work, it seems increasingly unlikely and undesirable to fulfil the necessary criteria.

At any rate, a company in its first season is ineligible for government funds, and without charitable status (a status bestowed after the application meanders through the Revenue Canada bureaucracy), ineligible for private foundation funds.

This establishes a number of art-killing ironies that virtually defy new companies to even try. Funding decisions for the second season will be based, in part, on production quality and the presence of "established artists" in the first season's work. The first irony is an expectation of production values that at once

indicate professionalism and simultaneously indicate little need of additional funding.

Secondly, we have the ugly implication that artistic validity is somehow the product of "established artists" taking an interest in your company. This absurdity devalues artistic innovation by holding up the norm as the ideal.

And thirdly, perhaps the most ironic, is that "established artists" are expensive. For the most part, these actors, singers, directors and musicians are union members and their unions are disinclined to reduce the minimum fee for which a member may work. These fees must be paid in advance of rehearsal. A small production budget can make it impossible to engage an "established artist" who is, incidentally, not entitled to donate his or her performance, nor to unilaterally choose to work for a reduced fee.

The conflict between arts funders, both public and private, looking for an association with established professionals, and artists' unions like Canadian Actors' Equity Association inclination to make that very difficult, is perhaps the greatest absurdity of the current funding system. The net effect is to discourage the establishment of any new group, and at the very least to force the group members to work for no wage for many years, except for the minimum paid Equity artists (but no other artists).

The initial budget, written Aug. 7 (see Appendix II: "First Draft Prospectus") is quite close to the actual final figures for the 1997-98 season. It lists total costs at \$13,200, excluding artists' wages. Where the numbers are quite different is sources of revenue. The August document, more an act of the imagination than reality-based, imagines opera box office of \$6,800. In fact, paid attendance (about half the total audience) was closer to \$2,500. And (this reveals my enthusiasm and naiveté) I

imagined raising \$10,000 for the company by selling five private performances at \$2,000 each, with all the money going to the company.

The idea of Opera Breve providing entertainment at private functions: concerts or staged operas, proved successful, if not immediately and not financially overwhelming. But the concept is valid, and bookings lead to more bookings. Opera Breve was paid for a performance at a gallery opening in May. A family friend, Ivan Moldowan, provided me the idea of how to promote the idea of private performance to the Hors d'Oeuvre audience. We held a raffle at the November performances in the Chan Centre. Audience members received ballots which asked them to check the boxes that indicated the musical style of private at-home concert they would like to win. We drew the winners at our executive meeting following the Nov. 15 performance: Royce Frith and June Goldsmith. While June has yet to use her prize, she has been one of the company's great supporters. The other winner, Royce Frith (a friend of mine from Ottawa who has been supportive of the company since I brought the idea to his attention in August 1997), arranged for the company to perform at The Vancouver Club in May. This led to another Vancouver Club booking, for which the company would be paid, and the interest of individual audience members in hiring the company for private affairs. Information from other ballots helped us build a mailing list.

My impatience to begin the season, and desire to grow very quickly, were the product of honest ignorance and led to over-enthusiastic budget projections. The business plan, revised at the end of September, does not sufficiently consider human resources (who will do the work), the cost of human resources (who must be paid, and how do you make that fair), and the element of time. Growth, even the growth of an idea in the imaginations of performers and supporters, takes time. Just

because Mari and I were already convinced this was a great idea, didn't mean that others would feel the same way, and certainly not immediately.

The approach to finance, to raising money for production, shifted dramatically once the season was underway. First, there would be two November performances of opera excerpts, not operas (see Artistic Direction, Chapter IV), and they would be rehearsed at UBC, performed in the Chan Centre at UBC, with a budget of \$0. The money raised here, by audience donations, came at a time when the initial investment of about \$700 had run out, having paid for items like the demo tape, incorporation, promotion of the Hors d'Oeuvre (stamps, envelopes and photocopying), and the month-long rental of a P.A. system for the November cabaret performances.

Opera Breve also intended to take 20 percent of the money garnered by the four performers (three singers and a pianist) from audience gratuities at the Cabaret each week. Between the Hors d'Oeuvre and cabarets, I still anticipated a bank balance of around \$2,000 by the end of December. That balance was closer to \$1,000 after the purchase of the vital fax machine with broadcasting function.

We had also hoped to sell subscriptions to the March operas (a ticket to each of the two shows) and memberships for \$25, \$50, or \$100 at the Hors d'Oeuvre. We sold only seven memberships, all to my friends, and to my parents who were very generous. An anonymous donation of \$500 was not only generous, the response of the executive and cast was one of delight. This large contribution, shrouded in mystery, suggested the company had caught the attention and imagination of a serious arts benefactor. Much pride all around.

Clearly, though, this show did not have the financial impact I had intended.

One purpose of the show was to introduce Opera Breve to prospective

corporate and private donors, as well as to prospective board members. I sent out 300 invitations (with brochures) to a Who's Who of business leaders in Vancouver, many of whom sit on other arts boards of directors or who are high profile members of the business community. Additionally, I invited about 50 family members, the Department of Theatre Faculty and the School of Music Faculty, and the friends of some board members. All received formal, mailed invitations.

Almost none of these people showed up. \$50 in photocopies and \$150 in stamps and hours typing, stuffing, and sealing envelopes did not turn into enthusiastic audience members with big checks in their pockets. I was still too focussed on the corporate ideal. Who came to our first shows, giving us two audiences of about 80 each? Our friends and family. It was a lot of fun, I enjoyed the performances very much, and I enjoyed the audiences after the show. They were supportive, and excited by what we had done.

One reason for the absence of corporate assistance (except for Listel Vancouver, which was exceptional) was my own inability to ask for money. I hated the very idea of organizing meetings with potential donors, following-up letters with phone calls. The phone calls, designed to arrange for a meeting, were terrifying. Only once or twice did I ask for money. It was a weakness I did not overcome, and that created anxiety while it interfered with fund-raising.

I had figured in my mind that the bottom line minimum with which we could produce in March was \$3,000: \$1,000 each for production (sets/costumes/performance space design), marketing (printing costs, stamps, photos), and rehearsal space. I did this calculation in my head and became too comfortable with it. It left some things out, like acquiring a piano for the second-floor ballroom. But it was basically realistic. The artists would be paid by box office,

as we had always agreed and as the performers knew. The ideal of this arrangement was that the company could pay all of the up-front expenses in cash, so that the only cost remaining was payment of the performers through box-office division. The guarantee: no debt.

By January, we had more than \$1,000 in the bank with a donation of rehearsal space from the UBC Theatre Department, and an anticipated donation of printing costs. I felt comfortable that the minimum required to produce was in hand. I recall, however, a Tuesday meeting at which Donna Wong-Juliani questioned how that was enough to produce the operas. I thought it was, but Donna did not. She, not I, had been there before. I worried.

We did not have any great source of funding to anticipate. For productions in March (which would later shift to May, but not for financial reasons), I did not see significant money coming in. The cabaret might add a few hundred dollars. I had grown exhausted of my few fruitless attempts to interest corporations in our work. I did anticipate cheques for a few hundred dollars from two or three people (which occurred), but the greatest funding source now, I anticipated, was the sale of memberships.

The executive discussed the membership offer made in our November brochure, and agreed it was not feasible or clear. Indeed, it was a combination of donor-level giving, which included perks that came off the top of my head, including free-parking at the opera for donations above a certain amount, and basic membership, which put the person on our mailing list, allowed us to send them a newsletter and invite them to special events (none of which were planned).

We agreed, at Donna Wong-Juliani's suggestion, that a straight price of \$25 for a membership would be easier to sell, especially since we would mainly rely on

members of the board, the executive, and some of our performers, to go out and sell them to people.

With this focus, and knowledge that to wait for graphic designer Ivana Cappelletto to produce this unplanned brochure (for membership only) would be unnecessarily long, I produced my own design and presented it to the small meeting of board members Jan. 25. I had jumped the gun, photocopying hundreds of them. A handful of suggestions, including the correction of editing and spelling errors, required I copy them again. This precluded the distribution of brochures that day, to all present. Before the end of the meeting, Donna Wong-Juliani suggested waiting for Ivana's season brochure, which could include the membership material. I was hesitant, given the unknown time frame, but the cost of using an amateur effort was also significant. So we waited, and the sale of memberships fell off the immediate list of "things to do" for the Opera Breve team.

With my disappearance into greater depression by mid-February, and disappearance altogether for weeks after that, all design and printing decisions were left to Donna Wong-Juliani and Mari, whose schedules did not always conveniently fit Ivana's, who was about to have a baby. In the end, the brochures did not become available until after another board meeting, this one on March 22. At that meeting I presented a new budget (Appendix II), this one calling for \$5,000 in membership sales. I anticipated, and asked at the March 22 meeting, that each board member sell 10 memberships, and that executive and five other singers sell five each. It seemed like a reasonable amount, and would provide the company with 100 members and \$2,500. In fact, that campaign, which continued through to the end of the season, produced 23 new members. At the end of the season, including those who became members in 1997, Opera Breve had 35 members.

Once again, however, the issue of responsibility versus favours welled up, and very few considered the sale of five or more memberships essential to the company, and a clear responsibility.

The bank balance did not begin to cover the up front costs of production, mainly because the anticipated prepayment of two Equity members (John Juliani and Human Voice stage manager Kelly O'Hagan), grew when we discovered that two singers were designated Equity members, by Equity, just before we began rehearsals. Andy and Adam were declared Equity members upon going into rehearsal for the Vancouver Opera's The Barber of Seville in early April. Both were surprised. They would now need to be hired under the Equity guest artist agreement, which meant an unanticipated and huge outlay of funds that had been designated to cover other immediate costs.

This was a period in which I was completely absent from all Opera Breve work. I know the Equity surprise put the entire production into jeopardy. And this is just another example of how frustrating, negative, and damaging I found Equity's behaviour. Though the organization that represents actors, singers, dancers, directors and stage managers has an undeniably fine and necessary purpose, the inflexibility of some Equity staff in the area of "concessions," those deviations from the strict contract that allow professional artists to work under different circumstances, can be simply destructive.

Equity's primary function is to set minimum wages and work place conditions so that its members have a guarantee of a reasonable wage, a clear job description, and safe working conditions. A professional performing arts company that wants the opportunity to hire talented young performers, must be prepared to hire Equity members. In Vancouver, many young singers become Equity members

after working in the Vancouver Opera chorus for a set number of productions. Eliminating such artists from our company's pool of potential performers would be absurd.

An association with Equity helps a company establish itself as one that respects artists and wants to pay them a fair wage for their work. Paying all performers, both Equity and non-Equity, wages based on the Equity "Guest Artist Agreement" goes even further to establishing a company's reputation for professionalism and fairness.

From earlier meetings with Equity, I knew that the operation of Opera Breve was beyond the association's comprehension. It conceives of opera as a large cast production with several performances each week, four-hour performance calls, and at least two six-day weeks of full-time rehearsals. Presented with our company, which required significantly less rehearsal time, performed brief operas with a maximum of five or six performances over three consecutive weekends, the initial response of Equity was a retreat to the basic contract which would require Opera Breve to pay for rehearsal hours that would not be used, and performances that would not occur. This, despite the willingness of the artists involved to allow concessions to a basic Equity contract that could make them unaffordable.

When the contracting finally occurred, Equity offered no concessions. I was not involved with the arrangement. Donna Wong-Juliani provided Equity with the amount of money we could afford, and Equity determined how many rehearsal hours (based on its strict minimums) would be allowed. Equity also recognized six 90-minute performance calls (including a preview) as one full-week of performances.

Everything was rushed at this time, and potential negotiation time with

Equity was non-existent. I do not know if Equity would have allowed its members to work for less-than-minimum. While concessions are allowed, I got the feeling from my own meetings with the local Equity representatives that a stick-to-the-contract attitude was a pretty solid position, at least in regard to our opera company. I was struck by an attitude that implied to me it was better to refuse work on behalf of its members, even with a growing company that intended to eventually pay Equity minimum shortly, than to allow a concession. With so many unemployed Equity singers in Vancouver, and opera work basically limited to the Vancouver Opera Chorus, I had expected more enthusiasm for Opera Breve than we received. Regardless, in the case of the Equity members of the first season productions, director John Juliani, tenor Adam Kozak, baritone Andrew Greenwood, and stage manager Kelly O'Hagan, Opera Breve got what it asked Equity for. Equity calculated rehearsal by an hourly minimum, rather than requiring a two-week minimum, and calculated those nine performance hours as a single week of performance rather than two-and-a half week of performance.

The money paid the Equity members basically destroyed the company's freedom to go into production with the intention of paying artists from box office, and not counting on box office to fulfil a budget requirement. Instead of going into opening night without the possibility of debt or a set amount that must be earned, there was now an expectation, which might have been countered if the the Equity situation had been presented immediately to all the artists. But now everyone expected to be paid the same amount prepaid to the Equity members.

This made box-office and donations received over the course of the run essential to meeting "payroll." When it was clear that everyone (excluding those already paid) would receive at most only \$100 less than the Equity members, I was

comfortable.

But Mari was not. She was in constant anguish over payment. "What if we can't pay everyone?" she would ask, stressed. My response that we could made no difference. In the end, everyone was paid the same, with Donna Falconer and Melissa paid in two parts, half in June and half in September, after the small difference was made up by cabaret performances. Mari withdrew from the co-op and went unpaid. It is worth noting that in the absence of the established minimum payment, the \$4,000 paid in wages could have covered a significantly larger co-op of about 12 people at \$350 each.

Of course, box office did not cover the costs of paying everyone, so production budgets suffered. Fortunately, Ron's set was practically free, due to the generous donation of new flats, and an arrangement to borrow set pieces from the UBC props department. Costumes were borrowed from the UBC Theatre costume collection, for the cost of dry cleaning. Ron also had access to lighting paraphernalia, and he constructed a collapsible bed frame himself for the Human Voice set. Ron also stepped out of the "co-op," as did Mireille, Donna Wong-Juliani and I. I consider these in-kind donations in the final financial statement. John Juliani also made a significant donation to company.

The total budget of the operas was well above \$3,000, and box-office covered only about half of the wages paid. Rehearsal space was generously donated by the UBC Theatre Department, and the cost of costumes/sets/lights/room design was minimal. With the prepayments consuming so much production budget money, that was essential.

The need to pay for printing, which went over cost by \$200 because of a communications error that saw the production of 4,000 brochures rather than 1,000

brochures, required that I use my own cash reserve, maintained for just such a moment. The Equity prepayment was budget crushing.

The sources of revenue for the first Opera Breve season were a combination of earned income from fund-raising performances, cash donations, box office, and donations in kind. Numbers are rough, given that no specific cash value was ever attached to in-kind donations, nor is there any detailed set of books to reveal the exact costs of those items and services for which we paid. A rough breakdown of the season puts the total budget at approximately \$22, 000. More than half of that is in-kind donations. Cash donations, including the purchase of memberships, came to about \$4,500. The company itself earned about \$2,000 from fund-raising performances, specifically the Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre, occasional income from the cabaret, a March performance on the Vancouver Sun Community Concert Series, and a May performance at a gallery opening. And box office for the operas earned about \$2, 500, the only amount that fell far short of even my most conservative estimates. That box-office figure represents about half of our total opera audience, many of whom came as guests of the company. In fact, the most significant marketing effort of the season was to fill seats with individuals, thereby letting the artistic success act as the "pitch" to potential future audience members, Opera Breve members, donors, sponsors, and board members. I had estimated \$7,000 in box office, based on 50 percent paid attendance in a 100-seat salon. Paid attendance was approximately 30 percent in an 80-seat venue, or fewer than 200 ticket sales where I had anticipated a minimum 500. Still, that worked out to a total audience of more than 300 for the first-season productions, which is pretty good.

Approximately half of the revenue, about \$10,000, went to pay singers, pianists, directors, and stage managers for the operas, cabarets, and other

performances. Another point of pride. A rough construction of a final financial statement for the season is in Appendix II.

Opera Breve had no significant debt, and did not owe any money after September. To the best of my knowledge, all involved with the opera productions felt well-treated, and would work with the company again. Adam, the only cast member who was new to the Opera Breve, was impressed with the dressing room (a hotel room) and the performance space, both of which he said were especially comfortable.

I was proud that we had ended the season as I had hoped, financially sound. All the bills were paid. As first seasons go, notwithstanding the potential for better marketing and ticket sales, this was a strong start.

CHAPTER VII: MARKETING

I imagined marketing would be simple. Having worked so many years as an arts journalist, I was confident of my knowledge of how to reach various media, and how to receive media attention with news briefs, advance feature stories, and reviews.

Not only did that element of marketing prove more difficult than I imagined, but other elements of marketing, elements that are ultimately at least as important as media attention, were almost non-existent.

I was inspired by the book, Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts (1997), which I had purchased in June. It was my formal introduction to the field of arts marketing. The book is directed at organizations of

various sizes, from new companies to the well-established.

After noting some fundamental conflicts between art for its own sake, and the need to sell that art in order to pay for it, a definition of marketing the arts emerges:

We define marketing management as the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of programs designed to create, build, and maintain beneficial exchange relationships with target audiences for the purpose of achieving the marketer's objectives. Marketing is the process by which the organization relates creatively, productively, and profitably to the marketplace, with the goal of creating and satisfying customers within the parameters of the organization's objectives (31)

This filled me with ideas that were not costly. Identifying a market for our operas, I noted the existing opera audience, opera students, music students in general, people taking continuing education courses in opera, the Vancouver Opera Club (a social club that hosts guest speakers), the Vancouver Opera's volunteer group: The Opera Guild. This is not to mention social groups in various Vancouver communities, including the gay community and ethnic communities, that undertake group outings.

I imagined these as groups that Opera Breve could actually visit, provide a brief promotional concert, and offer a group price for the productions, which would include pre-performance discussions with an "opera expert." Promotional work done early enough would allow us to encourage group sales with follow-up letters and updates on the company. All this required was time and organization.

For the more general "existing opera audience," I hoped the Vancouver Opera would include an Opera Breve flyer in one of its large mail-outs. After all, I had visited the Vancouver Opera in August and met three administrators who generously offered to help in any way they could. Indeed, Colleen Cruickshank, a senior administrator, noted that it was an element of the Vancouver Opera's

responsibility to support the development of new, small opera companies. Such companies, she noted, increase the audience for all opera.

But when I did call to ask about the mailing list, I was told "no." I asked if Opera Breve could see the Vancouver Opera's market surveys. She said that such surveys, if they existed, would be for internal (read: secret) use only. An insert in the Vancouver Opera's house programme was rejected. Nor could Opera Breve have any presence in the lobby, such as a display table.

The message I received was that the Vancouver Opera would not allow, maybe could not allow, any other opera company (however tiny) to draw focus from the Vancouver Opera. Cruickshank told me, in a tone lacking her summer friendliness, that I could ask questions of Vancouver Opera administrators, which they could choose to answer only if they had no other work to do at the moment, which she suggested was unlikely. Staff were paid to work for the Vancouver Opera, she said sternly.

Somehow, in the eight-week interim since we had last spoken, Opera Breve had gone from an exciting small project worthy of support, to an untouchable interference.

My disappointment with the Vancouver Opera only grew over the season. No one from the Vancouver Opera attended any Opera Breve events, or even acknowledged invitations. In October, her colleague had offered to make a "contra" advertisement arrangement that would allow Opera Breve to advertise in a Vancouver Opera house programme, in return for our publishing a Vancouver Opera advertisement in our house programme. When we approached the Vancouver Opera on this, the situation became ridiculous. Upon our request to be included in the Barber of Seville programme, the production that would end the

day before Opera Breve's May productions opened, the person handling contra ads needed to know the number of house programmes we would be printing, and what we charged for advertising, so that the actual value of ads would be the same. Obviously, there was no comparison. This support, too, had been withdrawn.

Marketing basics needed to be undertaken. With the dates of An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre set by August, and the company's need to begin sending out press announcements and to create promotion kits, we needed a company logo, stationery, and business cards immediately, followed shortly thereafter by posters and programmes for the Hors d'Oeuvre and "Cabaret Classique," which was the original name of the Opera Breve Cabaret.

I believed that design was vital. A logo, business cards, and stationery would provide the company with its first tangible sense of professional existence. It was as psychologically important to the company as it was important that we have a recognizable public image. I had considered asking my design instructor, Ivana Cappelletto, to undertake the work as a corporate donation, but decided first to ask my roommate, Steven Bobb. He was enthusiastic about undertaking the full design responsibility for the new company's public image and initial advertising campaign.

We talked about my image of the company, and I talked about casual elegance, a company that takes music and performance seriously, and that imagines performances in a casual, salon-setting as comfortable as a living room. And, of course, the singers were to be young, emerging professionals.

I know I mentioned to Steven at the beginning that Ron, as a board member, believed he could provide \$500 in printing through a relative or friend's printing company. This became an element of the confusion and frustration that ensued.

Steven gave this project no priority, despite my casual attempts to write out

lists of deadlines, dates by which certain elements were essential. Mari, Emma and I began visiting potential opera performance venues using a promotion kit with a logo-design I created myself: an ugly, amateur effort that took the place of a logo that it seemed would never come.

By the middle of September, weeks after the logo ought to have been finished or, better yet, after a couple versions ought to have been provided for a group decision, Steven saw the logo I was using and kindly criticized it, noting we really needed something better.

Finally, the day before the Sept. 27 public meeting, Steven provided the logo. It was very impressive. I liked it very much. I chose it alone, without consulting the others. The work was so overdue, I did not think there was time to consult others. The following week I photocopied the piece of stationery Steven had designed, and chose not to print business cards, but to use perforated sheets designed to allow the printing of business cards on a computer printer.



Fig. 1
The Opera Breve logo designed for Opera Breve by
Steven Bobb. Copyright Dreamworks Design Resources

Steven believed a professional printer would print a sheet of cards that had different peoples' names on them, but here my ignorance of the whole printing process paralyzed me. I didn't know to walk into a printing shop and ask for that. Steven thought professional printing was available, but it became clearer that Ron's suggestion would not be available after all.

Steven was always overdue on deadlines. He provided the Hors d'Oeuvre poster very late, and it was very different from what I had requested. I asked for an image, a face, a painting perhaps, using a piece of original art as the main non-print element of the poster. Instead, Steven produced this white-on-black, all-text poster (see page 76).

I revealed it to the group at an October meeting, and the response was completely negative. But it was too late for changes and complaints: no stand-by designers who could produce a poster in an hour. This was always a problem, I think, not having a designer who would work very quickly on short notice.

Steven had produced the poster, the brochure, and the invitation all at once. The white-on-black theme was constant. When I went to photocopy them, I found that the flat black would not copy properly. It always looked grey or speckled-white. And the grey lettering disappeared completely.

I remember being at Yum-Yum's restaurant on campus, that Thursday, feeling utterly defeated. I was encouraged to take the items to an off-campus photocopy shop, where better machines than that in the Theatre Department would do a better job. I did. The copies, which were now depleting our bank account, did, in fact, look better, though not perfect. Thumb prints easily defaced a poster or brochure. And the brochure could not be "cropped" along the top or bottom because there was not enough paper. They kept a white border on top and bottom.

IT WON'T BE LONG...
A New Chamber Opera Company

Operabreve
VANCOUVER

presents
AN OPERA BREVE Hors d'Oeuvre

An operatic celebration to introduce the ensemble and artistic team to Vancouver.

NOVEMBER 9 **NOVEMBER 15**

7:30 pm 4:00 pm

BC Tel Studio
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts
CALL 228-0886
to reserve your seats

The 1998 opera season will be announced Nov. 9

A Company Fundraiser. No Admission. Donations graciously accepted.

A Company Fundraiser. No Admission. Donations graciously accepted.

Fig. 2

The poster for An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre that was quite different from the requested dominant facial image. We hated the poster. Some considered it unreadable, even confusing with the dominant "9" and "15". Designed for Opera Breve by Steven Bobb@Dreamworks Design Resource.

When I mentioned to Steven the following week about the photocopy trouble, he was surprised I had photocopied them. He told me the materials he provided me were just proofs, to be discussed: if I had intended to photocopy, rather than print these items, he would have "screened" them.

The final problem came with the house programme and brochure, both to be used at the Nov. 9 and 15 performances. I believe I proofed the material the week of Nov. 3. The final versions were not finished until the evening of Saturday, Nov. 8.

Although I had specifically noted that both documents should be foldable, they were both designed as eight pages, requiring a staple. What's more, pages 4 and 5 of the brochure (advertising our March season and encouraging membership and other donations) were blank.

I raced, with my brother, to UBC, where I began the photocopying of the house programme, while I worked on the computer to attempt a photo-spread of rehearsal photos for the blank pages. I returned to the photocopier to discover that the white-on-black cover of the programme was a disaster. The heavy paper stock I was using even exaggerated the speckled white problem. I didn't know what to do. This had to be done now. So I photocopied about 100 disastrously ugly cover pages. Additionally, the laser printer would not work for the photo spread I had thrown together, and I was forced to use an ink jet printout, which looked hideous. Again, I photocopied in desperation.

I left there ashamed and demoralized. I felt responsible for having allowed this situation to fester for so long, to a point where there was no time to improve a bad situation. But my brothers were helpful, and encouraged me to redesign the cover myself, using Steven's elements but without the black background. And I found a way to turn the brochure into a more workable form by cutting and pasting

it onto a piece of 11x17 paper that could be folded in four.

The design and pasting took me late into Saturday night, and the reprinting of hundreds of pages at Richmond's Office Depot consumed Sunday morning. But they turned out much better than they otherwise would have, and I was not ashamed of what we presented.

Steven never did create a cabaret poster, though I had been waiting more than a month for something. I never mentioned it again, and Steven never designed for the company again. I learned a lesson about marketing management: deadlines must be met regardless of the kindness or intended generosity of the volunteer providing their professional work as a donation. Deadlines provide the essential time, if necessary, to change design elements, or change designers entirely.

However, among the four member executive, at this point, none of us had a designer in the wings we knew we could count on. Finally, it was poster distribution that failed completely. This may have been because it was so ugly that no one wanted to use it, but it was a poster that had important information that ought to have had wide distribution. This is where marketing broke down in so many ways: even when there were good ideas, such as group sales to identified markets, postering, and distributing brochures, this mundane, time-consuming work had virtually no one to undertake it. A serious lack of committed volunteers, and an over-worked or indifferent cast and management, meant stacks of posters and brochures never moved, and the direct pursuit of ticket sales never occurred.

Though the design improved drastically with the work of Cappelletto Design, beginning in December, the person-power to move brochures and to move tickets was absent. So too was any months-long media schmoozing that could be transformed into advance media coverage for the May productions.

I am too critical. The plan, again, was too grandiose. We planned too many performances over the season, I made box office projections with no reasonable basis, and expected media interest to result from a campaign that required more volunteer work than Opera Breve could muster.

However, the poor poster campaign in and of itself points to a problem that is rooted in the early days of the company. It points up how unusual was the start-up of the company, and the price Opera Breve paid for the "small business" model of which I was so enamoured. This is discussed in more detail under Personnel, but suffice it to say that there were too few people all along with a sense of personal investment in the company. The titles the executive bestowed upon ourselves implied too much individual self-importance to undertake cooperative ventures like poster campaign with a sense of individual responsibility. Any team of volunteers, or individuals, who offered to help with "anything" would clearly be identified as inferior to the executive, a kind of unskilled group of labourers. No one wanted to be just an Opera Breve labourer.

Media and promotion kits were a victim of this lack of clear responsibility, lack of organization, lack of time, and a poor model for the media package. While the first promotion kit was without professional design, full of typos and other editing problems (a product of my own haste and disinclination to be edited), and without any visuals (i.e. photos), there was a completeness to it, including separate pages defining the company, introducing company members, outlining the proposed season, and references to published information indicating a general increase in the size of Canada's opera audience.

The package was never properly updated, which meant that after the initial search for venues for the opera and cabaret (the original intention of the package),

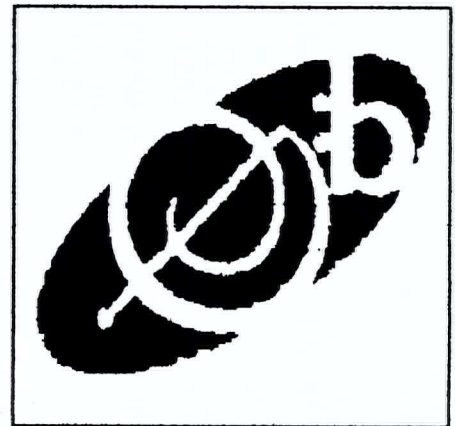
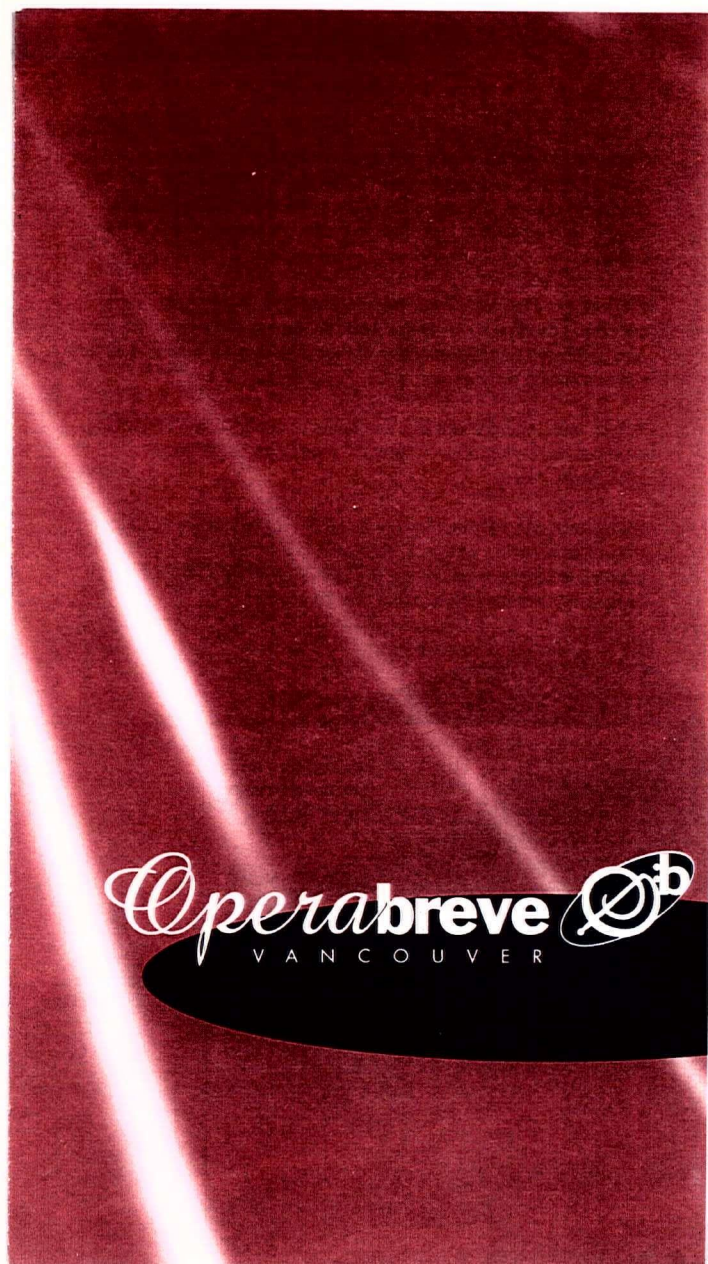
the company had no material to hand to media or to potential board members/supporters.

At the March 22 meeting board meeting, the first attended by Nancy and by new member Margaret Segal, the brochures, designed by Ivana, were still not ready for distribution. But Donna Wong-Juliani had picked up about a hundred of the printed brochures, which I had to have "cut" to size. I brought these few unfolded brochures to the meeting, as a chance for those gathered to see it. But we could not take the full, intended benefit of this meeting to send those individuals present away with bundles of brochures (see page 81).

Given they were our first printed document to advertise the upcoming performances and to invite the purchase of \$25 memberships, they were very late indeed. We had not been able to use the brochures at the previous weekend's performance, presented by The Vancouver Sun, at West Vancouver's St. Francis-in-the-Wood church. In fact, we had no timely material on the company to hand out that night.

Now, on March 22, Margaret specifically asked for a promotion kit to provide those she thought might support the company. In fact, she was to attend a meeting of several business leaders that coming week. We had nothing current. I took several brochures to her the following Tuesday, but no real promotion material.

In fact, the promotion kit/media kit was constructed by Mireille and Donna Wong-Juliani, and ready Wednesday, April 22: five weeks later. At this point too much time had been lost in terms of providing Margaret with promotion material, and brochures had not been properly distributed even to supporters of the company. The brochure was not used in a high profile fashion at the cabarets.



Figs. 3 and 4

Ivana's brochure cover (Fig.3) and detail of the insignia she designed (Fig. 4). The brochure design provides a colour and texture (crushed velvet) for Opera Breve's graphic image. Notice the new insignia used as part of the company logo. The insignia is used alone on some Opera Breve stationery and other print material. I had hoped the cover would include a temporal reference like "May 1998".
Designed for Opera Breve by Cappelletto Design Group

And in terms of media, the kits were late (for material that should have arrived on media desks the week of April 13), and we had arranged no photography, so there were no images to include in the kits that were relevant to the upcoming productions. Additionally, the media kits had no material specific to the operas and the performers. The material was very general. No synopses, no composer biographies, no biographies of the performers or information on the characters they would play. As a media kit, it did not simplify the work of the journalist or listings editor who could grab a photo, write a brief about the productions, and pad a story with provided information.

Postering fell victim to the existing problem: no one wanted to do it, no one undertook it as a serious endeavour. No one saw it as a responsibility, everyone saw it as a favour to do for Donna Wong-Juliani, if they had the time. At a going-away party for Mireille the week of April 27, Donna Wong-Juliani had a pile of posters, and asked each person to take five or 10 and put them up. The stack remained when I departed that evening.

I helped Donna Wong-Juliani assemble the media kits on April 22, and I took the media kits with the promise to deliver them myself the next day. The next day, however, I once again found myself unable to operate, still in the grip of depression. And once again I made a call to Donna Wong-Juliani telling her I would not be able to do what I had promised to do. She could pick up the media kits at my parents' house.

The following week, they were still being delivered by Leanne Koch who had volunteered to act as publicist for the company upon Mireille's departure. I had spoken with Leanne when I learned of her decision to volunteer, and attempted to arrange to meet with her and Mireille, or just with her alone, to discuss phoning

media, and approaches to coverage, as well as writing and sending media releases. I missed all appointments.

We had no advance publicity in the media, but we did receive reviews in The Vancouver Sun (The Human Voice), The Province (both operas), The West End Times (both operas), Terminal City (both operas) and (after the run) in Opera Canada. In addition, a feature piece on the local French CBC-TV was broadcast during the run, and Mari had a brief interview on the local CBC Radio morning show. All but the Sun piece were positive, and even the Sun piece was positive once you got past critic Lloyd Dykk's fundamental argument that our salon-style production was artistically invalid (see Appendix III).

The hotel itself did little in-house advertising. No prominent posters. Nothing in the guest rooms (i.e. brochures), and the desk had misinformation about the location, times, and prices of the performances. That lost us some audience. Clearly, we had not had enough interaction with the hotel and hotel staff in advance of the run. Nor had we provided the staff with clear information to answer phone queries, especially from hotel guests.

We did, late in the run, write an invitation in letter form for hotel guests, for placement in rooms. We did find some audience among hotel guests, but our profile was very low. We also got some walk-in audience from the sidewalk board.

We were listed in the most-read, high-circulation local media in their regular entertainment listings, including The Vancouver Sun, The Province, The Georgia Straight, Terminal City and Xtra! West.

In retrospect, it seems clear that haphazard marketing was detrimental to potential audience. We can never know how many more audience members we would have had. But the lack of motivated volunteers, planning, an active media

liaison person, and group sales were detrimental. Perhaps this is the area where my illness was most felt: I could have at least worked with Donna Wong-Juliani and Mireille to organize the kits and get them to media, with appropriate follow-up.

My bouncing from promises to abandoning promises of work, my on-again, off-again general participation, everyone's (especially Donna Wong-Juliani's) sensitivity to maintain for me a sense of being in charge, and my clutching that sense of importance despite the grip of depression, allowed for big holes in a marketing campaign.

In the end, I think, the greatest marketing tool, other than the weekly listings for the Opera Breve Cabaret (which kept the name in the public eye) has been the artistic success of the first season, and the fact that, despite difficulties, more than 300 audience members attended the Opera Breve productions.

One specific challenge that probably did not affect attendance, but which would have if the marketing had been more successful, is the confusion of running a season in repertory. Granted, this was a short season and the repertory only two productions. Even so, I encountered people who were confused about which opera we were producing, and then further confused that the same opera was not performed all weekend.

General marketing thought is that audience members look for reasons not to go out, not to see a show. Any element of confusion, of potential frustration will keep a potential audience member at home, or send them to the movies. Running two shows at once, with a list of dates and times for each show, creates confusion. For a poster to list two titles, and separate dates and times, for a newspaper listing to do the same is to create confusion. This is discussed in Artistic Direction (Chapter IV) and in Conclusions and Recommendations (Chapter IX).

CHAPTER VIII: PERSONNEL

Throughout the season, Opera Breve suffered enormously from a paucity of dedicated and available workers prepared to undertake and see through major and minor responsibilities alike. In retrospect, this need not have been the case. The ideas of an executive, volunteer workers, a co-op system of payment down the road (for some), and a restrictive method of title-assignment all contributed to personnel problems.

In the end, the essential operation of the company, including production of two operas, occurred. But in many cases work was done under difficult, do-or-die circumstances, in crisis mode (especially the set design and lighting). And in many cases, particularly in marketing/publicity, front-of-house work and promotion of Opera Breve to our own audience members, important work did not get done at all. This was not for lack of volunteer professionals, but for lack of volunteers, period.

Why was it so difficult to get even one or two people to devote themselves to the company in a "non-execute" volunteer roles? People would offer to help out with whatever needed to be done, but I would either mistrust such an offer as insincere, since it did not come with a specific interest, or I would not have the time and energy, or even any idea, what to ask them to do. I preferred the volunteer who said "I believe in the company, I want to dedicate myself and my time to (fill-in-the-blank) work. Why don't I undertake project X, and bring it to you." I would then, I hypothesized, invite the person to the regular Tuesday meeting, and name them to the executive.

Of course, only two people stepped into the organization like this. Lee Pledsted approached me at the September 27 general meeting for singers (advertised in The

Georgia Straight) and identified himself as a producer, with a particular talent for marketing. He provided examples of one-night shows he had produced for full-houses. I was pleased.

The second person was Mireille Rijavec, who stepped up before the November performances, to take on the publicist's role. She had worked for some years in a federal government communications job. She would be pleased to undertake the work, with some lessons and pointers from me on approaching the media. I was very pleased.

However, the structure under which we were operating was starting to become a liability. When Emma, Mari and I began, we gave ourselves titles: Emma and Mari were both co-artistic directors. I was executive director. And we wrote out job descriptions, but only after the first rumblings from Emma that she was being ignored by me and Mari, and ignored as music director for the Hors d'Oeuvre.

The three of us were the first three members of what would be the "co-op," the group which would include one or two more members of the "executive," and the artistic teams for the operas. The co-op wage would be derived solely from box office, and divided equally among its members.

This meant that some volunteers were more equal than others. And our intention to pay the singers, directors, designers, pianists and stage mangers, whose work would consist of few hours and over a relatively brief period of time, already implied a significant unfairness. What of those devoting months and months to Opera Breve?

But the artists needed to be promised something, or at least, the potential for something, up front. It was important that artists be paid for their work. This was vital to my concept of the company: to pay artists for their work, even if, in the first

season, it was more symbolic than representative of the artist's real value.

What I did not consider to be of equal importance was the mundane work, the planning work, the hard work of hunting for funding, designing posters, schmoozing media, postering, proof-reading, budgeting, etc. Although I had this sense that Opera Breve was a small business and needed to be run like a small business, the idea of making the work of small business attractive, somehow, did not cross my mind.

I am critical of artists in general for failing to sell their work out of a misguided, self-important sense that they deserve an audience without having to go out and get an audience (marketing art as a product). But I did not see I had made the same presumption about those who work for an arts organization. I imagined enthusiastic volunteers would pour in because the company (Opera Breve) was such a good idea. When that didn't happen, my initial response was anger at the public for not embracing the gift of Opera Breve.

I did not devote time to "selling" the idea of working for Opera Breve to individuals who indicated interest, nor to those I imagined would be good at such work. The first reason was as suggested above, I figured that once word of the company got out, especially after the advertised Sept. 27 information meeting and the November performances, individuals would be lining up to say; "I want to be in charge of all poster and brochure distribution. I have a team of friends I have already organized to do this work out of respect for your company," or to say "I am an outstanding fund-raiser. I can raise money for anything. Give me a phone, and a page of information, and I'll raise \$10,000 before the end of January."

Individuals did approach me or another company member, expressing a desire to volunteer. I took some phone numbers and business cards. But by that

point, another element had come into play. I was increasingly exhausted, days were very long, my disappointment that more volunteers had not come along was great. I had too many more pressing things to do (I thought) to deal with volunteers. I did not have the time to phone someone, arrange to have coffee, discuss their interests, and provide them with a full, independent job to perform. I had too much work to do, and no ability to delegate.

In retrospect, the two levels of "volunteer," executive and labourer, should have been eliminated. We should all have understood we were volunteers. Only the artists would be paid, from box office, in the first season. If any others were to receive honoraria at the end of the season, that ought to have been left to the end of the season before it was even considered.

Also, pursuit of a publicity team should have taken on a different shape. This was not an established company. There was no "team" of true believers waiting to do boring work. I had imagined, early on, that those potential singers from the September meeting, most of whom filled out volunteer forms, would be such a "team." But once it was clear that shows were cast and there would be no performance opportunity for many of them in the first season, interest quickly dissipated. I attempted a grandiose scheme of phoning everyone who had filled in a form (more than 20) within one week of the original meeting, to invite them to a special meeting to create the "company," which was the word we had chosen to mean volunteer, not part of the "co-op."

A rented room at the Kerrisdale Community Centre on a rainy Thursday night brought out five people. I had numerous photocopies outlining various jobs, and a hierarchy which put one company member in charge of four or five others. It would be a huge organization. On the smaller scale, when people like Alexandra

(Sasha) Tait, Irene Kurka, and a few others asked how they could help, I had no answer. I was too busy doing everything, and accomplishing little of it.

Not only was our system of "payment" and our lack of knowledge on how to acquire and keep volunteers maintaining a small, and relatively ineffectual executive, but it also provided a breeding ground for intra-executive frustration.

By giving ourselves executive titles, with implied (but ill-defined) responsibilities, any real sense of a co-op, where despite some specific responsibilities the group shares equally in numerous other responsibilities, was lost. If one person needed help, i.e., Mari with casting or Melissa with organizing a cabaret (both of which proved difficult tasks), they could be regarded as not fulfilling responsibilities, rather than depending on the co-op's shared responsibility ideal.

The mundane task for the marketing director or publicist was to find people to poster, litter brochures, perhaps phone 50 people, etc., was not undertaken with the required enthusiasm of a co-operative enterprise for which this kind of work was anticipated and undertaken without complaint or avoidance.

We might have organized ourselves better, but that in itself would have had its own dangers in that it would have meant more time-consuming preplanning. Launching the company sooner than pure reason would allow is probably essential. Without taking advantage of the passion and enthusiasm of participants, a new company can drown in preparations and lose momentum quickly. Mari, Emma and I were eager to begin, and I pressed for performance dates and rehearsals as soon as possible. But perhaps the establishment of a real co-op group should have been the aim of the first four months, and the Hors d'Oeuvre, a company-building event for which the main focus might have been to establish a real, inclusive company of artists and staff. Those involved, and those who took the time to attend, could have

been invited to play a really creative role in building the organization. Perhaps we could have finished 1997 with a real co-operative in place.

The idea of having a group of eight or 10, all of whom share a belief, and a vested interest, in the success of the company would have provided the person-power and person-hours to undertake the larger tasks.

This is not to suggest that as publicist, Mireille's work was not good or appreciated. In a way, it was Mireille's organized, regular weekly press releases and "listings" faxes that turned Opera Breve into the recognizable company name from which the company has subsequently derived so much success. Still, the long-term schmoozing of a handful of journalists, phone chat, story-pitching on cold-calls, seemed not to fit Mireille's personality. Had this work been done, especially well in advance of the May productions so that stories could have been pitched in early April, it would have been helpful to the marketing campaign which was otherwise almost non-existent. But Mireille's departure from Vancouver that month, and her packing and preparation for her graduation recital, demanded Opera Breve install a new publicist in February or March. Despite the fair-warning of Mireille's departure, this was yet another area where there seemed no time to find someone, and once Leanne volunteered the time to provide guidance, and encouragement was also lost in the frantic activity, and confused priorities, leading to opening.

The departures of Emma and Lee are perhaps the most educational to me. I do not believe that either could have stayed with the company, but the series of events that led to their separate departures from Opera Breve are significant both for the weaknesses and realities these events revealed about our organization, and the kinds of personalities that can have difficulty functioning in a new enterprise that ,

simply by being new, must makes mistakes. A new company relies on individual initiative and group support.

Emma, as noted, seemed constantly frustrated with the company. In early October, she, Mari and I set aside time to listen to Emma's complaints, and reassure her of her importance, stroke her ego, and create our first job descriptions which merely stated the obvious, what we were already doing. I got the sense that Emma needed to be told what a good job she was doing, and needed praise. This was to be an ongoing need. Emma's expressions of frustration always preceded a threat to quit. This was a sword hanging over the company. As she became committed to performances, the price of an upset Emma became very high.

Emma finally chose to leave the company over the executive's decision not to perform the series of concert dates at seniors' homes that she had booked. I can't help but feel that the decision to cancel them was an intentional insult to Emma for all of the frustration she was causing. However right or wrong the cancellation, it was done in a fashion that was unkind.

Emma was also at odds with Lee. She considered Lee's ideas, for marketing and for cabaret, to be too grand. His conception of the company as a casual-high-brow organization struck her as a fundamental opposition to the whole point of the company as she had conceived it: to give singers the opportunity to sing, and sing a lot. Lee and I felt strongly about maintaining an upscale profile that was not fully conceived, but it was the main reason to cancel those performances.

In retrospect, Emma was more right about the real opportunities the company needed at the time. And I think Emma's personality, rather than her ingenuity, led to her real isolation within the company. In fact, Mari arranged for a performance at a seniors' home in January, the product of Emma's not responding to the home's

phone calls. Donna Falconer, Bremner Duthie and Melissa all went to White Rock.

The result was enormous enthusiasm from Melissa and Donna Falconer about the experience, and their expression of desire to do more of this for such a friendly and appreciative audience. Donna Wong-Juliani spoke of the success the Vancouver Boys' Choir always had with seniors' homes, and we began to discuss booking dates at more local, Vancouver-area seniors' homes. So much for risking the company profile by entertaining old folks.

As for Lee, his departure only one month later, was different. His role in marketing, though never completely clear, did include certain undertakings, including arranging the design, pricing and printing of postcards and posters for the cabaret. Generally marketing the cabaret was also within his domain, as was setting up the cabaret P.A. system and staging the cabaret. His staging, I would hear from those working with him, was unappreciated and ignored. Singers did not feel comfortable with his ideas. True, singers can be difficult and do not like to move around, or be told where to move. But if they are going to move, some interpersonal tactics work better than others. More importantly, the cabaret posters Lee took responsibility for at the end of October did not exist a month later, when a friend of Lee threw together a Christmas poster for us. It was not unattractive, but it was not the poster we were looking for to use in a non-seasonal circumstance. By mid-January, there was no poster (and no postcard), although Lee's designer-friend came to a cabaret with her mock-ups. We all liked them. Then the designs disappeared. Lee offered no updates on when they could be printed, and at what cost.

At the same time, Lee became demanding. He asked to be paid for his cabaret work, setting-up and dismantling the P.A. system, just as the singers were paid. And he wanted to drop the marketing element of his tasks. I thought it fair that he

be paid as the singers were paid, so I said agreed without consulting others. Big mistake. Speaking with Mari and others I realized that, by extension, everyone should be paid. But we were all really volunteers. It was important to me that artists be paid for their work, including the cabaret work. But it did not cross my mind that anyone else be paid at all. The singers were paid little, but it was a token reserved for artists. I believe (and still believe) an element of the company's growing reputation was a reputation for paying artists. I could not see, nor anticipate, Lee's position. But it gave me pause.

It grew clearer to me that Lee had established himself as an employee: paid a token amount to set up and dismantle the P.A. system. I grew frustrated and even angry. Mari and Mireille were even angrier. We had no paid staff. We all put in hours and hours of unpaid work. Why separate his work with the P.A. from Mireille's work writing and faxing the cabaret media releases? It was left to me to tell Lee that he had reduced his role to that for which he was to be paid, work that could be done by a volunteer who would likely be more reliable than Lee had proven himself over the short period he had been in charge of the technical elements and stage management of the cabaret. We really needed his work as the marketing manager, as a volunteer like the rest of us. He departed the meeting and I did not hear from him again during the season.

That was a sad day. Perhaps it was just sentimentality, but Lee was the first person who broke through the invisible Breve barrier, the exclusive zone of special titled people, and said he was interested in the company, and wanted to devote himself to working for Opera Breve.

I am not certain why it took so long for the marketing materials, for which he undertook responsibility, to appear. The question of fairness grew large with him,

as it had with Emma. Some were equal, but some more equal than others. Perhaps he considered the small payment a form of recognition, a tangible token of his importance to the company: proof that he was not less important than Mari or Donna Falconer, both of whom were paid when they performed with the cabaret. In fact, of the six-member executive, three of us were not paid anything because we did not also perform in the cabaret. I had never considered this arbitrary. To get back to Emma's point: this company was about singers singing, and (I may add) paying them to sing.

But the issue of fairness, where some felt less important and less appreciated than others, became very complicated and cost the company two people who had at one time been devoted to working many volunteer hours for Opera Breve.

In addition, there was difficulty caused by avoidant behaviour. Several of us were required to undertake tasks with which we were not comfortable, and instead of forcing ourselves to take the risk and learn by doing, we simply avoided the responsibility. The main example of this is the cold call: contacting a total stranger, explaining who we were, what the company was mandated to do, and ask for attention or help.

We avoided contacting companies and individuals and then asking them for money. Even inviting a stranger to a performance was sickening to me. And the idea of the follow-up phone call, which felt like hounding rather than an essential marketing element, made me anxious. Instead of undertaking such pro-active fundraising and audience gathering, we let much rest on a one-time only invitation or fax. Such passive marketing is almost no marketing at all. With no serious follow-up strategy, the initial approach was almost a total waste of time and money.

And Mari, as stated, was avoidant about contacting choir leaders and voice

teachers regarding their students as potential Opera Breve performers. Despite discussions about her contacting John Washburn (Vancouver Chamber Choir), Bruce Pullen (Vancouver Bach Choir), and voice teachers at the Vancouver Academy of Music and the University of Victoria, these phone calls were never made.

CHAPTER IX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Opera Breve ended its first season with financial and artistic health. It accomplished all that a first season ought to accomplish, including a clear route into the second season. By June, budgeting, fund-raising by board members, and artistic planning was under serious discussion. Credit belongs to all who involved themselves in the company. Everyone, regardless of size or length of involvement, contributed to the success. The bumps we experienced, large and small, commanded attention and problem-solving. The learning curve for many of us was steep. But the key word is learning, and that is always valuable. I would say that those of us who undertook this project with little or no experience in our roles, could never go back and start the company again the same way. We know too much.

For all the "small business" thought I poured into the original idea, that model required a swarm of volunteers and an excited line-up of underpaid singers. The fundamental idea that individual commitment requires some vested interest in the company failed me. I had a vested interest in the company, not only to acquire the work experience, but to initiate and perpetuate the activity that was predestined to provide the source material for my MA Theatre thesis. I had often

stated that on the level of the thesis, it did not matter if the company worked or not, the purpose of the thesis would be to note how events transpired, and attempt to understand them. But that was not entirely honest. I wanted very much for the thesis to describe a success.

Others involved had their own motivations, and vested interests. For some, such as Emma and Lee, those interests were, ultimately, not served. So they left. Most board members, I believe, wanted to see this young and innovative company succeed. In the case of Nancy, I found her interest shifted over the course of the year, and she resigned from the board at season's end.

The thought of providing volunteers a reason to work with the company never crossed my mind. When the name of a volunteer arose, I found myself with little to offer in terms of interesting work. In some cases, the offer would be ignored. That was the case with two high school students who volunteered to help out prior to the Doctor Miracle rehearsals. Though much work in postering, envelope stuffing, rehearsal assistance, and front of house was required over the next several months, neither I nor anyone else contacted them.

Also left out of the volunteer-work equation were the singers, directors, and stage managers, in November and in May. They were, for the most part, treated like treasures for whose rehearsal and performance work alone we were grateful. In fact, the lost opportunities were made clear to me at the end of the May run when Kelly, the Human Voice stage manager, mentioned to me her surprise that she had not been asked to do any postering, brochure distribution, or other such tasks that are traditional in low budget co-op-style productions where such shared responsibilities are part of the shared desire for the production to receive maximum publicity, and to succeed in attracting a large audience.

I was vaguely aware of the difference between a co-op and a small business, but I never clarified it in my mind, which resulted in much of the company's difficulty. At the general information meeting held in September, where more than 30 people expressed interest in the company just by showing up, I made what I considered a good, motivational speech. Specifically, I talked about how a new arts organization must begin. If we had a million dollars, I said, we could go out and rent a theatre, hire singers and carpenters, publish full-page advertisements in The Vancouver Sun, and charge more than \$50 a ticket. And it might even work as a successful first season, as long as financial losses were budgeted for the first many years before real corporate and governments support kicked in. The problem there, I noted, was that it was an instant business, artistically sterile with a large bureaucracy and no developed artistic identity.

What Opera Breve had, by being financially impoverished at the start, was the opportunity for artistic significance, for the growth of a vision, for the basic organic process that shapes the most innovative and respected arts groups. We had something better than cash: a vision. You, I said to the audience, are vital to Opera Breve which today is a name and a dream. Be a part of the dream by bringing your creativity and talent into the Opera Breve family.

Or something like that.

I honestly believed that this was an exciting, rare opportunity we were providing: the chance to be a core element of a new opera company in which you could not only work, but help to define and develop it. In fact, that is an attractive opportunity. But we never offered it.

The balance of the meeting included the introduction of the titled Mari and Emma, who announced what operas had been chosen, when they would be

produced, and when singers could come and audition for the shows. This was the kind of organization I had denigrated in my speech. The main difference is that we had no money. We offered no dream, and we offered no money. I couldn't see the contradiction. I couldn't see the price we would pay for it.

Opera Breve ought to have been, I think, from the outset, an organization of singers, pianists, a director or two, a marketer who could take care of the few essential administrative tasks, and a single, visionary artistic director with the drive and ability to see operas produced. Instead of my conceiving the company and asking Emma and Mari to take care of the artistic responsibilities, the whole project should have been initiated by a motivated artistic director. Perhaps this means Opera Breve was undertaken with weaknesses so significant they should have killed it. The fact they didn't kill it is best attributed to a commitment by the few involved in the company to see those operas produced.

But the company, even at the end of the first season, suffers from the nature of its genesis. Artistic direction is still poorly focussed, and the business orientation continues to keep volunteers at bay. Much too early in the life of the company, individuals want to be paid for any activity on behalf of the company. There are no dream-filled singers and opera lovers gathered in a room, waiting to participate in a discussion of programming and volunteer work allocation. Few share the Opera Breve dream.

We did attempt to invite singers to join the Opera Breve "Ensemble" by which they agreed to a few hours of volunteer work and Opera Breve promised a minimum number of cabaret performances. But it never worked. The Ensemble members were not regular performers, and were not called upon to undertake volunteer work, except as a favour, if at all.

I think it is not too late to create a small ensemble of performers, cast for the whole season with the guarantee of one opera and a handful of cabaret performances, all with predetermined dates. The arrangements should be made before September for that season, with a clear understanding among all that some co-operative work (like postering) is expected.

Among those essential non-performing members is a person to establish a marketing scheme, or schemes, for the various elements of the company's work: operas, cabarets, private performance. The marketer/publicist is responsible also for the marketing budget, graphic design and production, press releases, selling and booking private performances.

In retrospect, no element of management is more vital than marketing, and for a new company, the primary focus for the manager should be marketing. Marketing a fund-raising performance where other fund-raising pitches may be made is as vital as marketing the main productions. General management should be limited to budgeting and engaging artists, perhaps the domain of a managerial associate or board member. And the manager must undertake no artistic responsibilities. All production elements must reside with the artistic director, who may delegate tasks as she or he sees fit. But never to the manager.

For the second season, with the main productions planned for May, I recommend employing a professional independent publicist on a six-week contract (not full-time) to engage the media, promote advance stories, fill the opening night seats, and encourage reviews, all with a focus on specific markets. The manager should focus on producing marketing materials, and group sales.

Volunteers for marketing, publicity and writing grant-applications might be discovered in the world of enthusiastic volunteers who have played such roles in

the past, even the distant past, as board members or staff of other organizations. I still believe in seeking recent graduates from marketing programmes and publicity programmes, at universities and colleges, who could undertake this work as hands-on, résumé-building activities in the short-term, taking the experience as payment. Postings at these schools, and some faxes and chats with course instructors, could have drawn such volunteers to the company.

Private foundations, like the Vancouver Foundation, the Hamber Foundation, The Koerner Foundation, etc., do provide money to local arts groups, in particular for the acquisition of items like lighting equipment, speakers, stage construction, or other permanent necessities: once charitable status is secured.

One challenge for any marketing/publicity campaign is running two separate productions on alternate nights over one time period. I suggest performing operas one at a time, even if one show follows the other. That is, even if there were two weekends of show A and then two weekends of show B. The weekend phenomenon, a requirement of O'Doul's which needs week nights to set for next-day meetings, might be opened up to allow for Thursday performances on the first weekend of the show, or second weekend, allowing for an additional evening performance. I would also scrap the Saturday matinee, and make the Sunday performance at 3 pm, which is a more frequent start time for a Sunday show.

As far as the evening content goes, I believe that the idea of a stand-alone one-act is vital. No two-hour double bills. But a performance prior to the opera, a period in which audiences may order beverages and grow comfortable with the environment, is a good idea. Artistically, it would provide the evening with more bulk, and it would give the programme the extra half-hour that many audience

members wondered about or complained about in the first season. The evening seemed too short. The price too high.

A New York Times story on Jan. 11, 1998, reveals how popular direct pre-show interaction with the audience can be. In the article, "Passion and Moonlight, With Footnotes," James R. Oestreich writes that "Talk from the stage has become commonplace in recent years, if not during concerts themselves then in the form of preconcert lectures, as musical institutions strive to sustain or build on current audiences." The story focuses on how two New York musicians, the pianists Jeffrey Siegel and Ruth Laredo, have built loyal audiences with their reputations for audience chat. The article describes Siegel's ability to provide audiences with an illuminating introduction, and then reveal his interpretation of the anticipated musical elements in his performance. In Siegel's well-planned introduction to one performance, Oestreich writes, "Siegel did remarkably well .. not only speaking but also playing from memory, even as he extracted a voice from the texture or showed how a particular turn or cadence might have progressed differently." The intimacy of this relationship, established before a performance, seems ideal for an opera company that wants to build a reputation for intimacy. Of course, it must not appear to be a student matinee-style primer, but instead express enthusiasm for the work in a sophisticated way.

The pre-performance work need not be undertaken by an opera performer. A musical performance prior to the opera itself may consist of one or two instrumentalists, or pianist and singer, performing work that has some connection to the evening's opera (composer, period, style, influence, source). A speaker could introduce the evening's programme, and follow-up the pre-opera performance with a word on how that work relates to the main event. The subsequent, brief

intermission creates a time period in which audience members could spend time at an Opera Breve information table, or at a table selling books and CDs related to the evening. Local stores could be approached to allow the sale of their products at performances, with a table staffed by Opera Breve volunteers. Such an arrangement could include a portion of profits going to Opera Breve. And audiences love these tables.

Of course, the additional performers (if the opera performers are not appropriate or available) would add to costs, but it would also justify maintaining the ticket price at 1998 levels of \$15. It might also have a separate sponsorship, or separate financing arrangement.

I do not think such an arrangement would draw important focus from the opera. On the contrary.

On the question of tickets and admission, I believe we were too ambitious last year with advance sales at Duthie Books, The Magic Flute and Little Sisters with tickets \$15 or \$18 at the door. The company is still not sufficiently well-established to court pre-show sales at a discount. And the \$18 was, we discussed, too high for a one-hour performance. Even \$15 was thought high by some, given the length of the performance. As mentioned above, I believe the \$15 can be defended. Perhaps it could include the first non-alcoholic beverage for each patron. I'm not sure what price Listel Vancouver could give Opera Breve on that, but it might encourage more sales (especially with an intermission), and it would provide a sense of value for the ticket price.

On the subject of pre-show public sales, I consider it not worth the trouble. Instead, Opera Breve should advertise a phone-reservation number, and do follow-up with the phone calls to confirm them and then, perhaps, a reminder call the day-

before-performance. This would take time, but I think this kind of audience-connection can make the audience member sense his or her individual importance to the company. Opera Breve needs a phone book listing, and a relaunch of its web site.

The question of repertoire is one that I believe demands some comment. All of the company's promotional material, from the beginning, has stated that the one-act opera, the opera roughly one-hour in length without intermission, is rarely produced, though hundreds exist, many by composers famous for their larger-scale works.

This is true, and needs to be exploited. From the start, we agreed that a great selling point for a one-act opera was to invite those who know a lot or a little about opera to see a fully-staged production of a little-known work by a composer they know. This was established by the production of the Bizet in the first season, and the Poulenc to a lesser extent.

In a meeting early in 1998, Mari, Donna Falconer and I discussed the elements of a four-opera season (which at the time meant two pieces in repertory in November and two pieces in May). The idea was for the operas to include, in some way: an opera by a well-known pre-twentieth-century composer, a comedy, a drama, a family opera (which younger children could enjoy), and a Canadian opera. The exciting options, given the grants available and potential private corporate interest for the Canadian opera to be a premiere, even a commission, or the premiere of a Canadian-translated libretto that may be the first English version.

When Mari suggested two operas in the Fall would be difficult, we agreed that one opera, perhaps a regular seasonal offering, was a good idea. Donna Falconer would look into Christmas or just family-oriented comedies. We talked about

commissioning an operatic version of The Gift of the Magi, for two singers.

The presence of a chorus should not deter from an opera's potential for production. Like so many other elements of Opera Breve, this is an opportunity to establish a creative and artistically valid approach. A full chorus, like a full orchestra, would be wrong for the scale of production. And unaffordable. But a chorus may be reduced to a single voice, or to very few voices, perhaps four. These performers may be voice students earning performance credit, or honoraria for their work. They need not be included in many staging rehearsals. The chorus may be eliminated altogether (with the score intact) if the director so chooses.

Directors and other members of the artistic team should be varied to allow for constant originality in approach. Once more firmly established artistically, Opera Breve should invite directors and designers from other parts of Canada, and from the worlds of film, dance, and visual arts in addition to theatre. I remain interested in what filmmakers like Mina Shum or improvisational comedy performers like Jay Ono, would do with a small opera. Equally provocative are thoughts of inviting the young Québécois director Jean-Frédéric Messier or more high-profile directors like Quebec's Denise Filiatrault or the Shaw Festival's Jim Mezon, Neil Munro, or Christopher Newton. Perhaps I am naive, but I believe many directors, especially those who have never had the opportunity to direct opera, or have had few such opportunities, would consider working for near-scale (with travel and lodging arranged) to undertake the new challenge. I believe the small-scale of Opera Breve productions, and the challenge of using a salon space, would be appealing, and unthreatening to many. The company would benefit from the artistic growth, and from the increased public interest within Vancouver and beyond.

Company growth will also allow for additional instrumental

accompaniment. Scores may be reduced (at some expense) for a set number of instruments, perhaps four or five. A score reduction may be commissioned by Opera Breve, using a grant or donation acquired specifically for this project. The Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia and the defunct Vineyard Opera in New York both have histories of acquiring or commissioning reduced scores (Driscoll 28). The AVA librarian, or its executive director Kevin MacDowell, would likely be able to provide information on access to these scores, as would the Vineyard Opera's former artistic director, Joseph LoSchiavo, now director of the Sylvia and Danny Kaye Playhouse at New York's Hunter College (28). Perhaps developing a relationship with the AVA, LoSchiavo, or Operas in One Act author W. Franklin Summers would lead to other sources of opera information, and perhaps to new ideas and opportunities to co-commission or tour.

I think it vital that Opera Breve have a public presence in the Fall and in the Spring for it to become a full company in the public imagination. A new production, or a remount could be considered for Fall. This fits with my thoughts on eliminating repertory, and eliminating the crowding of two productions in a single two-week period. One production should be presented in the Fall, a second in the Spring. Marketing costs would be higher with two separate performance periods, but successful marketing would be significantly easier. And media coverage could double. As the company moves towards a three- and four-opera season, the operas could be arranged through the year like the season productions of any other performing arts company. This would create some organizational and timing issues with Listel Vancouver, but such issues need not be addressed until the possibility is real.

Essential to developing company repertoire is library research. Opera Breve is

delving into operas that are not well-known to opera lovers, or even to opera teachers. Hours in the library are essential to developing a knowledge of composers and their works. Some composers worked only in the short opera format.

Librarians are invaluable in the search for scores that may not be available in Vancouver. Given that many works are rarely produced, it is likely few scores are available in or near Vancouver. But all can be acquired with patience and the assistance of music librarians at universities and at the larger opera houses. This search for pre-twentieth-century opera titles and scores is not a weakness, but the very strength of the company in its development of a unique repertoire.

I remain supportive of maintaining the company's own developing production repertoire, and presenting these rehearsed shows with some regularity as special events, private performances at clubs or in homes, or in concert with a small chamber ensemble for one performance only. One performance during the run of a new season's opera could be dedicated to a revival: maybe the second Friday, or the second Sunday matinée. These are also shows that could be remounted as part of a season. Doctor Miracle, for example, might have been mounted for late November 1998, had the organization been in place. It could certainly be considered for November 1999.

And approaches to the various summer arts festivals around B.C. should be explored, so too the possibility of participation in Pacific Opera new summer opera project, and a performance at Whistler, in the ballroom of a sponsoring hotel.

By the third season, the company will need to engage its marketer and manager (and artistic director) as employees. Piece-meal approaches to season development must turn into a 12-month schedule which incorporates deadlines for various artistic plans and marketing plans, production dates, audition dates, grant

application deadlines, and fund-raising events. This does not mean 12-months of work, it means planning that should reduce the possibility of stress and crisis, and eliminate much of the last-minute panic where too many tasks are undertaken over a short period, producing work that is good enough, rather than good.

The bottom line to this organizational plan is an ability to pay the regular staff a reasonable salary (at least part-time) as soon as possible. That which is worth volunteering for in the first and second seasons must become more formal if the organization is to maintain a continuity of management and artistic focus.

Within three years, the company needs at least three part-time staff, which will cost at least \$60,000 in core funding. But the importance of this development cannot be understated. Proper, realistic budgeting, that allows for growth in salaries and the increase, over time, of fees to artists, is the manner of growth that determines the long-term strength of a company. Growth that maintains the original artistic vision truly establishes an arts organization. Time will provide some response to my thesis question of whether or not a new performing arts company can be established in the current financial and artistic climate. But building a company involves so many variables, the experience of Opera Breve will, finally, not answer the question conclusively.

Still, my experience of Opera Breve, the dedication of individuals, the enthusiasm expressed by many for the artistic idea and its fruition in production, the clear potential for corporate support, and even eventual support from the grant system, allows me to conclude that a company can be established. Only the dated model of grant dreams and an angry sense of entitlement will surely eliminate the possibility for a new company.

After giving serious thought to the ideal of working without government

grant money, I came to the easy conclusion that a theoretical ideal ought not to stand between Opera Breve and funding to which it is entitled, under the current system of grants. I would only caution that government money is generally unlikely, except for a special grant to commission a composition or a translation. There is also money for administrators to take courses or (potentially) hire a managerial advisor for a short period.

My personal conclusion that arts administration is not a career I choose to pursue right now is one product of my Opera Breve education. I remain keenly interested in how the professional arts can operate within the realities of today's social and economic milieu, and I believe I would work well in a larger organization as a middle-manager. Business leadership demands an aggressive and dynamic personal style, and an ability to set high expectations and pursue them vigorously without experiencing disappointment as failure. I do not regard myself as a business leader.

With the current board, management, and artistic direction, all of which are a product of the first season, I see unlimited possibilities for Opera Breve. With wounds healed and some objective distance from the company, I can see the result of what Emma, Mari and I undertook, and take pride in that.

"The course of true love never did run smooth," I have learned, applies to my love of Opera Breve. It is a love that began with an idea and two sopranos, Mari and Emma, whose singing inspired me always.

CHAPTER X: IN OTHER WORDS

10.1 Preface

The following were written by six Opera Breve colleagues. All are dated January 1999. Each person was asked to contribute an article in which she or he revealed personal thoughts on the first season. I provided no specific requirements save a general idea of the purpose of the thesis itself: to be useful to those who would undertake a project like ours.

None of the contributors had read any part of the thesis. I had completed my own work before reading and inserting these articles. These independent thoughts enrich my thesis by adding a variety of perspectives and conflicting conclusions. And they all provide useful, constructive criticism.

10.2 Donna Falconer

When I look back at the first year of Opera Breve, I cannot help but feel pride at the overall success that the company has achieved in a very short time. Although the year was filled with a great deal of success, some initial "growing pains" were experienced along the way.

I think one of the greatest accomplishments made by Opera Breve in its initial year was the flexibility and willingness to change and try new methods and approaches, and to recognize areas in which improvement was needed. For instance, the open attitude and experimentation evidenced by the opening Chan Centre performances in November of 1997 established the company as one unwilling to be just another traditional opera company struggling for a "concept."

The two performances showed us that the product was valid and, indeed, marketable.

In addition, I think that the willingness to have flexibility in venue and performance conditions was a vital part of the success of the first year, because it demonstrated the mandate claimed by the company, and also served to target audiences not usually considered concert patrons. Particularly successful were the performances at the Vancouver Club, and the Buschlen-Mowatt Gallery.

I believe the cabaret performances at O'Doul's were, for the most part, successful. Once the piano was replaced by the hotel management, the musical standard was greatly improved. In addition, once we were able to increase the fees paid to cabaret performers, we were able to better control the consistency of the programmes. By increasing to \$25 and then to Equity minimum, we could demand a higher standard of professionalism from the singers and could better dictate repertoire that would make for a more successful cabaret. Initially, we were so pleased to have singers interested in performing that we allowed them to suggest their repertoire. This sometimes made for programs that were uneven and not as accessible to the O'Doul's audience. To remedy this, we began to use themes for each cabaret. Unfortunately, it was difficult to maintain this, while keeping familiar repertoire on the program. By assuming an active role in cabaret programming (in conjunction with having a higher payment as incentive for learning unfamiliar repertoire), Mari Hahn ensured that each cabaret program had a unifying element or theme, with better-balanced programs.

Looking back at the first season, both of the productions, The Human Voice and Doctor Miracle, were quite successful. I believe that the intimate space created in the ballroom at O'Doul's worked well, and the audiences seemed to enjoy their

"close-up" view. The number of tickets purchased was perhaps a bit disappointing. We could have improved our initial season audiences by perhaps delegating some specific tasks to non-performing members of the ensemble. For example, the idea of targeting retirement homes and seniors' housing developments for possible group ticket purchases was mentioned in November, but we did not follow up on this adequately. Because of low marketing resources, we had to primarily rely on word-of-mouth advertising. I anticipate a much larger audience in our second season, both from increased resources and a clearer definition of responsibilities with regard to ticket sales. In addition, printing blank tickets requiring people to phone and book seating for particular performances worked relatively well, but could perhaps be abandoned as ticket sales become more reliable. There did seem to be some confusion on the part of patrons regarding this system.

Overall, Opera Breve has been a remarkable adventure--one that has vastly surpassed all my initial expectations. It has afforded me an opportunity to develop professional experience in an area of great interest to me, that of opera coaching and musical directing. I have been proud to be associated with its remarkable growth.

10.3 Melissa Peabody

My experience with Opera Breve was valuable to me personally in that it got me out of my feeling of being at the mercy of the established opera world, the whole system of auditioning, seeking the approval of those with the power to hire or not hire, waiting and hoping to be chosen. Being on the executive and being part of the co-op production gave me an opportunity to use some creative decision-making skills. I was very grateful for the opportunity to network with other musicians and creative people and for the exposure I received through performing with Opera

Breve. My only criticism in this area is that there seemed to be confusion involved when it came to "who gets to do/should do what." This was, I have to admit, frustrating. There were some instances, which I won't elaborate upon, in which I felt strongly given the message not to overstep my boundaries. In the future, maybe peoples' roles and responsibilities could be further clarified to avoid ego clashes.

There was a general consensus among the singers that changes to the [English] text [of Doctor Miracle] should have been made well ahead of time. No one wanted to re-memorize material that had already been learned. Apart from that, I thought that the director [Kico Gonzalez-Risso] did a wonderful job, and was very generous in offering people extra time to work on their scenes with him, if they so desired.

Re: the role of Veronique [Melissa's role in Doctor Miracle], while it was perhaps a bit low for my voice, it was challenging to me in that it required strong acting skills, in terms of the character, and in the amount of dialogue included in the piece. It was valuable to me in that it showed me those things that I needed to work on in terms of development of character, timing, and inflection.

The ensemble worked well together, however, our schedules did not. Casting people whose schedules mesh is something that should be addressed for future productions. In my opinion, the number of complete run-throughs with the entire cast present was inadequate.

I sincerely hope that these few points will be taken as constructive criticism. I am thankful for the experience of having been a part of Opera Breve and wish all of the executive the best of luck with future endeavours.

10.4 Mernie Lee Plested

Working on a new company was very exciting. It's full of daily accomplishments and tons of creativity. Especially when working in the arts. Everybody is full of hopes and wishes for this new wonder.

Taking time to consider your own interests while realizing your own limitations regarding available time and energy can be difficult. People have varied commitments and it's difficult to organize when and where everybody can meet consistently and effectively. I feel a centralized office would have made a big difference. Everything is literally within grasp. Though this may be difficult to provide, it would have saved us a terrific amount of time on development of press releases, programmes, and promotion.

When we started the cabarets, they were intended to draw attention to the ensemble and provide a small, immediate revenue. A new show every week is a lot of work, even with opera singers that come with prepared rep. Simple direction and rehearsal take hours to set properly, not to mention new programs, posters and releases. A new rehearsed show up and running every month would have been a grace to the load we all were carrying. Especially with music students, whose programs are demanding and engrossing. The cabarets provided a great deal of warmth and inspiration amongst the ensemble and helped us think dramatically and realize our audience.

Few people have the time to work daily, even when things need to be done. It's difficult to retain an effective division of labour. Administration is sometimes the unrealized giant. Clear scheduling and realistic time guidelines are not always obvious. A more realistic division of responsibilities in the beginning would be an enormous contribution. Saving time, it lends itself to personal reward and

accomplishment. It also helps realize an equal share of work distribution.

The time spent with any company is always influential and inspiring. Everybody's dreams flourish around them. You become strangely attached to your colleagues. In the morning, you get up challenged, excited and ready.

10.5 Mireille Rijavec

Overall, my experience with Opera Breve was an extraordinary one. Two major points will be discussed in this paper: financing, and the individuals who make up the executive and the board of directors.

In writing the opinion which will follow, I want to underline that it is based on hindsight rather than any expectation going into the experience. I did have a previous experience that was easily transferable, but I had no hands-on arts administration experience before joining the company, therefore the experience was a new one. One of the positive aspects of joining Opera Breve was that I could fulfil one of my personal goals of entering into the field of arts administration. Because the company was small, I was able not only to learn how to be a publicist, but also to observe the goings-on in other areas and learn related skills.

One of the most difficult aspects of working with Opera Breve was that there was no financial base at the outset. I am fully aware of how difficult this is to obtain, but nevertheless, it was a main issue that often got in our way, or at least made things rather difficult. I know that all kinds of institutional or grant support was looked into but because of the newness of the company, we could not solicit that support. This problem was out of the hands of Opera Breve--we needed to be in existence at least long enough to have proven ourselves to be a viable company in order to ask for that kind of support. Ironically, we had no money to make

ourselves viable with. Lack of money was an ongoing problem.

If other ways of raising funds were considered, I am unaware of them. There could be a more "creative" approach to financing, for example, soliciting the backing of a larger company in exchange for free tickets for employees, free advertising, etc. I am unaware if this is at all done in the arts community, or at all successful.

It appears to me that the most probable financial support would have come from an individual or a group of individual sponsors. At the start-up of the company, if those members of the group most connected to the community could have approached individuals capable of financial support, we would have had a smoother beginning. The scope of the company is small enough that I believe we could have solicited and obtained this kind of support.

This leads to the obvious question of where was the support of the initial board of directors. Conventionally, it is up to members of the board to put up the initial funds for a company, or find ways to fund-raise in order for the company to have a reasonable budget to work with. I am aware that the initial board of directors were supportive of the idea of the company, and that some of the members were incredibly supportive with their time and expertise. What was missing were those board members who could find money for the company. The initial selection of the board could have been more balanced with respect to expertise and financing.

The lack of funds had the obvious result of the company not being able to pay the singers and the pianists their due, or pay the executive members at all. An honorarium to the executive would have been only fair in exchange for their time, and more adequate fees for the performers would have helped the company secure them and also attract better artists in the city rather than those at the point of their careers where they accept whatever engagements that will bring them experience. It

was difficult to obtain commitments from some of the artists, and I suspect that a decent wage would have eliminated that.

Another issue which is endemic to organizations which are short on funds is burn-out on the part of the most active and committed members of the executive. In a sense, this just demonstrates the commitment to the project, but because of the precariousness of the beginning of the company, this was dangerous as well. The dropping-out of any key member of the company at that time could have been disastrous for the company. To be fair, it wasn't that Opera Breve was burning out its executive, it's that every member of the executive had another important activity going on, whether it was school, or some other projects. Start-up funds to pay someone part-time to do the running-around that most taxed the core members would have been a great help. Once again, it boils down to money.

I believe that the most important elements to the success of a company such as Opera Breve are those individuals who comprise the executive and board. The initial group, except for certain minor exceptions, were dedicated, believed in the project, and were very capable. I feel this is essential to the beginnings and even the first few years of the company. The dedication and commitment of those members carried the company through the unavoidable growing pains, disappointments and set-backs. Also, the trust between the key players was essential, as was the team work. If there was a suggestion to be made to any future founders of companies, it is to choose your partners and board members at the initial stage carefully. If there were more members who were inept or not dedicated, the project would have fallen apart.

10.6 Emma Turnbull

When Michael first contacted me several months ago to write of my experience with Opera Breve, I was slightly apprehensive. My experience had not been a productive one, and I had hoped it was all in the past. Now, after writing my thoughts down and gaining contact again with Michael, I feel a certain catharsis. I have tried to be as honest as possible in retelling my account.

Michael and I knew one another from our Opera Director's course being taught by Nancy Hermiston. As our friendship grew, I spoke of my desire to start up a small opera company here in Vancouver that would produce small productions and tour throughout British Columbia. As a British citizen, I had been reared in the local music community and had always shown interest in promoting opera for all. Michael was very supportive of my concept and we both decided to venture into it together and ask the other members of this class if they too would like to be involved. After several discussions, myself, Michael and Mari were to set the ball in motion.

After a summer hiatus, we met for our first official meeting. Mari and I would share the position of musical director and Michael would be our executive director. I was very pleased with my position as I wanted to work directly with the singers and make decisions on the repertoire. I felt, and continue to feel, that in starting an opera company, the priority should be in creating a high level of performance through the skills of the singers involved. After you are established and a reputation has been built, you can afford to concentrate on other areas.

Our first thought was to develop the cabaret and invite local singers to perform arias and ensemble pieces at O'Doul's Restaurant during dinner. We would be working with a local choreographer Michael knew, and with some

hesitation, I accepted that this could turn out to be useful as most singers need a certain amount of direction on stage. As time went on, Mari and I saw that the singers themselves were better able to create their own movement. After a tense few weeks, we decided we no longer required guidance in this area. The cabarets went on to be well-received, and they continued.

As time went on, we began work on our first staged performance. The singers involved were well acquainted and rehearsals were very productive. On reflection, though, I felt I was given no support as musical director and began to lose my reason for being there.

As rehearsals continued, we met once a week to discuss the administrative details and to air our thoughts on developing the company. Michael, with slightly more experience in this field, played a dominant role and I was happy to allow him to express his ideas and be supportive. Unfortunately, as time went on, several things began to bother me. The company was to be a co-operative society and this meant that anyone could assume a position on the committee. Michael decided that we required a promotional administrator and understanding that the three of us could not do this alone, Mireille came on board. At this point, I was beginning to see that the emphasis on our performance was shifting. Without waiting to see how the audience reacted to our first show, we were already assuming that Vancouver would be enlightened by our talents and creativity. How could we be so naive?

As the performances drew near we tried to advertise but, as I remember, not too successfully. The audience numbers were adequate, but those that attended were excited and supportive.

From a musical point of view, I had worked vigorously with the singers but

always felt a lack of respect for my suggestions and there never seemed to be any interest in dynamics, dramatic expression through the text and music or thanks for my efforts. I began to wonder about my position within the company. The events thereafter are confused in my mind as I became very unhappy and disillusioned, and was constantly undermined. Many of my proposals were constantly rejected.

The meetings continued and, focussing on the cabarets, the other members suggested we invite Lee Plested to join and help in the running of the cabarets and assist Michael, as Lee, apparently, had had experience in this area. Also due to his knowledge of stagecraft, he was going to help with the choreography. I knew Lee already and was disappointed Michael asked him to become involved. Blessed with a strong personality, Lee immediately began to dominate the meetings, ignore excellent progress already made, and I suspected he had selfish motives for being there. The other members appreciated his many opinions and I decided to ignore my intuition and go along with the majority.

One of my thoughts on starting this company had been to bring opera to the masses wherever they may be. I saw a niche in performing in retirement homes for a small fee, but after I voiced my thoughts, the other members, without my being present, decided that this was not an avenue that Opera Breve should go down and, although I had already booked some dates, the company did not want their name associated with this venture. I was quite taken aback and extremely upset by this rejection. We were not a company yet with any prominence in the city and we needed all the performing experience possible. These events would be invaluable to our development in the community. Again, I was shown no respect for my input and my unhappiness was increasing.

At this point, I was beginning to lack confidence in myself as a musician, and

feelings of insecurity were creeping in. My self-worth was at its lowest and every rehearsal or meeting became an emotional upheaval for me. I had always pictured this project enabling me to express all my skills as a singer and musician. I was unable to gain any respect from the rest of the committee and slowly my role as musical director began to crumble. No one seemed to want to restore my self-confidence with encouragement or understanding. After much consideration, I decided to resign and let the others carry on.

Looking back over this period brings me great unhappiness. I felt that I was never taken seriously or asked for my opinion at certain crucial moments. The committee all presumed that the company would burst onto the music scene, but I never felt that the music produced was unique or stunning. Unfortunately, no one else cared as much as I did about this element, but ultimately this is what the paying public wants and if a company cannot produce something that sells, they fail. Opera is about passion, drama, and love. An audience wants to be transported to another world where they can escape from reality if only for a brief moment. Opera Breve diverted away from its original mission, to bring opera to the masses. The company ran before it could walk and, alas, that was their downfall.

I continued to sing with the company but left a few months later due to further conflict and lost all contact until Michael telephoned me to ask if I would like to write this article.

I hope my experience will not deter anyone from realizing their dream of producing and running a company. What had been my dream, initially, will certainly become a reality in my future and, this time, I will endeavour to proceed slowly and make it a fulfilling experience for everyone.

10.7 Mari Hahn

Opera Breve started as a good idea among three friends; little did I know that the idea would take shape into an actual project, and that this project would completely consume my interest and time during the 1997-98 school year. On reflection, the year was a successful one for the inaugural season of an opera company--perhaps a modest one financially, but a considerable one artistically. On a personal level, the year was a triumph for me as I discovered what I was capable of, and more often, as I tried to surmount situations in which I felt inadequate and insecure.

Many singer-types have undoubtedly entertained the thought of starting up their own company, as opportunities, for "gigs" are scarce, and the competition for the few jobs can be fierce. It is rare that such ideas can be brought to fruition--most singers don't have the first idea about running an organization, and have no desire to learn. When Michael Groberman approached Emma Turnbull and myself with the idea, and suggested a co-artistic directorship, I was excited about being able to assume such a position artistically, but anxious about the administrative demands that would surely present themselves. Michael's enthusiasm was contagious, however, and by the end of the summer of 1997, I found myself quite committed to the project. Integral to the birth of the company and its survival through the growing pains of the first year was Michael himself. I hadn't had previously a clear conception of what the roles of an executive director or producer were; within the first several months, Michael made that pretty clear.

By the time I returned from Europe in late summer, Michael had formed the concept of the company. We would specialize in one-act chamber operas, and choose non-traditional venues to perform in. Another aspect of the company

would be the production of regular, weekly cabaret performances at a restaurant, with the idea that these would generate income to fund our main season. It all seemed quite good to me, and with quite a bit of excitement we set off to incorporate ourselves and find a home for the company. This resulted in a flurry of meetings in which I dressed up in quasi-business suits and went along with Michael to try to plug our ideas to hotels and potential board members. The first several months resulted in chaotic activity as we struggled to produce material that was impressive enough, and Emma and I chose repertoire and found singers and pianists that were good enough to believe in the cause that they would do it for free. The end of 1997 resulted in Emma resigning from the artistic directorship position, and subsequently withdrawing from the company altogether. I was bewildered with the amount of work that somehow got accomplished: we found a home through the sponsorship of Listel Vancouver; the cabarets were underway despite a rocky start with the hiring and firing of a cabaret coordinator, and the presentation of an excerpt programme called Hors d'Oeuvre at the Chan Centre. The first term left me quite overwhelmed as I struggled with the hundreds of necessary jobs that Opera Breve demanded, and with my work at school. It was a difficult but very educational period, and I was filled with respect and admiration for Michael's knowledge and contacts. He was full of initiative and vision, but also attempted, to the best of anyone's ability, to implement his ideas and to approach and cajole others to believe in and support us. As exhausted as I was, I felt that we had come such a long way, and to give up would be inconceivable.

There are so many people that generously offered their assistance last year. Ivana Cappelletto gave us the design that allowed us to present ourselves in a professional way. Our main season brochure put us on the map for consideration as

a serious company, and we proceeded to prepare for the productions that would prove this. This gave rise to the next period of stress and anxiety, with the added challenge of producing another excerpt show for the Vancouver Sun Community Concert series. This is a period of time that I can't think about without a certain amount of discomfort. It was an extremely stressful time. I found myself having to deal with conflicts arising from the performers' not feeling comfortable with the artistic concepts of the directors, and often not getting along with each other. There were struggles in casting for the main season, with a lack of available tenors, and disappointments when I wasn't able to cast my friends. Everything had to be borrowed as we had no production budget, and previously enthusiastic volunteers were becoming increasingly sparse. Mireille Rijavec came on board as the publicist, and as capable as she was, her time was quite limited, and her departure from Vancouver a month before the main season left us crippled. I was feeling worn out and anxiety-ridden, and Michael was not well.

Relief came as two of our board members, John Juliani and Donna Wong-Juliani, decided to very actively help us out. They had been acting in an advisory capacity, and John had committed himself to directing me in The Human Voice. I began to consult him on artistic matters, and Donna agreed to step in as the executive director in the interim, to get us through the season until Michael was feeling better. We managed to pull through the season, albeit without accomplishing as much as we idealistically first projected, but decently.

Michael's gradual decision and announcement to pull out entirely from the company was something that made me very sad, and at first quite frightful. He was the heart and soul of the company to me, and I couldn't conceive of continuing without him at my side, prompting me and advising me. I've since realized his

decision was necessary and right, and I feel nothing but gratitude for all he has done to make our vision a reality; he made quite a considerable financial donation, as well as offering all of his work without any remuneration.

The wrap-up of the first season brought about a very useful postmortem, with all the performers and production staff present, and consequently, the goals and artistic vision of the company began to modify. Our accomplishments attracted a few new board members, who are excited by the company and seem well-connected to the business community. Donna has officially assumed the position of executive director, And John and I share the role of artistic director. The partnership is a much more successful one than the previous collaboration, with Emma. John and I have different things to contribute and complement each other well. The three of us have so far succeeded in maintaining professional relationships while forming personal friendships; the success is probably attributable to the fact that the Julianis have spent their whole lives running organizations like ours. Their mentorship has become synonymous with the future of the company, and my education and well-being.

The fact that we survived our first season with such limited means seems quite miraculous, but it really isn't, when one realizes the commitment and work of the integral members, and the generosity of a few people. Ron Fedoruk, the chairman of the board, stepped in at the last hour and gave us designs, sets, lights and costumes. The stage managers worked far beyond expectations to get the sets from storage and prepare them for performances. Many others did or donated what they could. I like to think that they all did this because they all believed in the cause,

not because they felt obligated to do a few favours for some friends. I still believe strongly in what we do, and strive to keep raising our artistic standards, and offer challenging and stimulating opportunities to performers and directors.

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APPENDIX I: CHRONOLOGY

March 1997

Michael, Emma and Mari decide to collaborate on a professional one-act opera company to begin production in Fall 1998. Michael will manage as executive director. Mari and Emma will work as co-artistic directors.

July 1997

Mari and Michael choose the company name: Opera Breve Vancouver

August 1997

Michael and Mari choose operas for the company's 1997-98 season: Georges Bizet's Le Docteur miracle (Doctor Miracle) and Francis Poulenc's La Voix humaine (The Human Voice).

September 1997

Incorporation as a non-profit society under the B.C. Societies Act. The first name request is rejected because Opera Breve Vancouver does begin with a descriptive rather than unique word. The company's official name changes to Bella Opera Breve Vancouver Society.

First board of directors comprised of Nathan Divinsky, Ronald Fedoruk, Nancy Hermiston, John Juliani, and Donna Wong-Juliani.

First five society members, the minimum for incorporation, are: Mari, Michael, Mireille, James McLennan and Hussein Janmohammed.

Mari decides the scheduled performances for the Chan Centre, Nov. 9 and 15, should be an hour of excerpts rather than an opera. Michael arranges for Valerie Methot to direct and the show is cast with Mari, Emma, Harout Markarian and Andrew Greenwood. Valerie's rehearsal schedule begins mid-month.

Sept. 6

Lise tells me informally that Listel Vancouver is ready to allow us a one-night cabaret, Nov. 2, as an audition. We may "pass the hat" to raise money.

Sept. 9

First regular Tuesday morning meeting at Mari's house for company executive.

Sept. 18

Advertisement runs in The Georgia Straight inviting trained singers to a meeting about a new opera company and cabaret, Sept. 27.

Sept. 23

Lise calls to say Listel Vancouver has decided to provide its ballroom for the opera performances, scheduled for March.

Sept. 26

Mari arranges a demo recording in the UBC Recital Hall, with performances by herself, Emma, Harout, Mireille, and James McLennan. Sonia Kim is on piano.

Steven Bobb gives Michael logo design for Opera Breve.

Sept. 27

More than 30 people come to the Saturday morning meeting in the UBC Theatre building. Mari and Emma announce auditions will be Oct. 19. Lee volunteers to undertake marketing and publicity tasks. Nhon Nguyen volunteers to establish an Opera Breve web site.

Sept. 28

First formal meeting with Shelley Stewart Hunt to discuss her organizing and staging of a cabaret performance. Michael, Mari and Emma attend.

Oct. 2

Lise calls to give the go-ahead for Opera Breve to perform a cabaret every Sunday evening at O'Doul's Restaurant and Bar.

Oct. 19

General auditions for potential opera and cabaret singers.

Oct. 30

Emma makes a handful of bookings for performances at seniors' homes.

Nov. 2

First cabaret performance at O'Doul's.

Nov. 8

Steven provides the house programme, season brochure, and contest ballot for An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre. Material must be photocopied, folded and stapled for next day's performance.

Nov. 9

First performance of An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre at the B.C. Tel Studio in the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Second cabaret performance at O'Doul's

Nov. 15

Second performance of An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre.

Nov. 30

Opera Breve sends out press release announcing Judith Forst as honorary board member.

Dec. 9

Meeting at which the executive decides seniors' homes are an inappropriate venue for Opera Breve performances, and ought not to be undertaken but offered as performance dates to the UBC opera program. Emma learns of the decision and resigns from the company.

Dec. 14

Second Christmas-themed cabaret, and company's final performance of 1997. Emma performs with the quartet, as she had the previous week. She agrees to continue performing with Opera Breve.

January

Melissa undertakes the role of cabaret coordinator, to begin with February cabarets.

Donna Falconer undertakes the role of Music Director.

Music in the Morning artistic director, June Goldsmith, invites Opera Breve to perform in March 1999, on her regular season, and to perform a short Viennese opera for a Vienna-themed performance programme in January 1999.

Jan. 11

First cabaret of the new year.

Jan. 16

End of a week of attempts to contact Emma, who appears to have forgotten a seniors' home performance. Emma responds on Friday to angry messages from Michael, Mireille and Mari. She has no further contact with Opera Breve.

Jan. 20

Tuesday meeting at which Mari reveals there is no tenor for the Doctor Miracle production. Meeting that afternoon with Mari, Michael, John, and Nancy at which decision is made to postpone operas until May.

Jan. 21

The seniors' home performance to which Emma had committed herself, under the Opera Breve name, but which she had chosen not to perform. Melissa Peabody, Bremner Duthie, and pianist Donna Falconer make the trek to White Rock.

Jan. 25

Meeting with board members and some executive members to discuss the upcoming productions.

Human Voice rehearsals have begun, scheduled to fit around Mari's rehearsals for the UBC Opera production that will run for a week in early April.

Feb. 6

Meeting of Michael, Donna Wong-Juliani, Mari and Lee to refuse Lee's request to eliminate all responsibilities except cabaret work, for which he wants to be paid. He is asked to continue in marketing, as a volunteer. Lee's participation in Opera Breve ends.

Feb. 14

Special Saturday cabaret for Valentine's day, hosted by Nathan Divinsky.

March 9

First meeting of the Doctor Miracle cast and director.

March 14

Performance of Opera Breve-in-the-Wood, a series of staged excerpts from short operas, at St. Francis-in-the-Wood Church in West Vancouver. Presented by The Vancouver Sun as part of its Community Concert series.

March 16

First review of Opera Breve opera performance appears in The Vancouver Sun.

March 22

Sunday meeting in O'Doul's ballroom for board and executive, followed by information meeting for singers about the 1998-1999 season. Singers are invited to "sign-up" for cabaret performances.

March 24

Season brochure, printed and folded, picked up from printer: 4,000 pieces.

April

Cabarets reduced to twice a month until the end of June, to reduce organizational work during rehearsals and performances of operas.

April 11

Rehearsal period for Doctor Miracle formally begins as schedules for those involved begin to open up.

April 22

Media kits for the May performances are prepared, and ready for delivery.

May 13

Final dress rehearsals for Doctor Miracle and The Human Voice.

May 14

Final performance of The Vancouver Opera's The Barber of Seville, in which Adam Kozak and Andrew Greenwood perform.

May 15

Opening night of The Human Voice.

May 16

Opening night of Doctor Miracle

May 22

Doctor Miracle at 8 pm

May 23

Doctor Miracle at 2 pm

The Human Voice at 8 pm

May 24

The Human Voice at 2 pm

Mari, Mireille, and Sonia attend their UBC graduations.

May 29

The Human Voice at 8 pm

May 30

The Human Voice at 2 pm

Doctor Miracle at 8 pm

May 31

Doctor Miracle at 2 pm

End of season party at 8 pm

June 6

Postmortem meeting with all those involved in opera productions.

APPENDIX II: BUSINESS DOCUMENTS

2.1 First Draft Prospectus

[This document is presented in its original form, with only minor editing to clarify some elements.]

August 7, 1997

First Draft Prospectus

First Season

1997/1998

The season consists of three pieces:

Poulenc's La Voix Humaine

Barber's A Hand of Bridge

Bizet Le Docteur miracle

The Barber can play as an opener for one or both of the full-length one-acts.

In November, all three pieces will be performed as one evening's event, and at least one matinee of each of the two one-acts. A second evening would be appreciated.

In March, the pieces will be presented again at our venue, which we intend to be a hotel salon, with seating for 100-150.

The [March] schedule will look like this:

Wednesday: Both pieces

Thursday: Le Docteur miracle

Friday: La Voix humaine

Saturday Matinee: Le Docteur miracle

Evening: both pieces

Thursday: La Voix humaine

Friday: Le Docteur miracle

Saturday Matinee: La Voix humaine

Evening: both pieces.

The second weekend will be built around a festival/seminar/lecture/listening evening (with other groups) on Poulenc and Cocteau, both of whom died in 1963, making 1998 the 35th anniversary of their deaths.

In addition to corporate sponsors, we want to approach a CD store (Magic Flute, Virgin, etc.) with the suggestion of setting up shop at the performances and seminar/speeches a table with CDs and books on the composer, the playwright, French opera, etc.

We would also like to work out an arrangement by which such a shop, arranged for by Opera Breve, could be provided in the lobby of the VOA to raise funds for Opera Breve.

We will approach various venues, including The Web Cafe, with the proposal of a regular cabaret performance, perhaps the same day once or even twice a month. We could give it its own name, but indicate it is a fund-raiser for Opera Breve, and use the cabaret not only to raise money and awareness, but to sell memberships, perhaps even take ticket orders, for Opera Breve.

A summer tour of the province should be arranged in January, with day outings (as far as Kelowna and Kamloops, as near as Surrey and Coquitlam and the Italian Cultural Centre) or longer on-the-roads. These trips will either be paid-for outright by the the budget of the festival, at least covering expenses for travel so we collect the door, or underwritten by a province-wide corporation, like Alcan, MacBlo, Fletcher Challenge, WIC Communications, Rogers Cable, etc.

We will also market ourselves in November as available for private functions including conventions, meetings, private parties. We will try to give a free private concert for a corporate Christmas party, to present ourselves to an audience of potential purchasers. Also, gatherings of provincial music teachers and drama teachers would be good performance opportunities either for a fee or as an advertisement that we tour.

BC Arts Council is very focussed these days on connecting the professional arts to the community in which it performs. The use of the local personality as the Opera Narrator (we'll give the role an Italian name) certainly reflects this, but if we can somehow include some small local chorus, perhaps only four or five members, performing only bits of choral work, we're in not only in terms of the BC Arts Council, but also in terms of the foundations and local corporations (on our tour). The question to be answered is if this is possible both in terms of practicality (a run-through with the choir) and will it affect the professionalism of production?

It will be difficult to receive any outright cash grants from existing foundations and granting agencies this first season. For some we need to be incorporated as a

nonprofit society first, which will not occur until after the November preview performances for prospective board members, sponsors, conference organizers, etc.

And many require that we have a charity number.

The nonprofit society incorporation (provincial) will take less than two months, and make us eligible in that way by March, when we announce our summer plans, and the next season.

The charity number will take up to one year, which means the end of 1998.

THREE-YEAR PLAN

First Season
1997/98

COSTS:

Sets	2,000
Printing	4,000
Advertising	1,500
Venue	5,000
Office [Expenses]	700

TOTAL COSTS \$13,200

REVENUES:

Box Office	6,750
(9 performances at 50/per at \$15)	
Private/purchased performances	10,000
(5 performances @ \$2,000)	
Cabaret	1,500
(6 performances/\$5 cover/50 people	
CD store	500

TOTAL REVENUES \$18,750

SURPLUS: \$5, 550 (divided among co-op members)

Second Season
1998-99

Same as first season with additions:

COSTS:

[First Season Costs]	13,200
Advertising	2,000
Venue	10,000
Singers/Pianists	10,000
(10 people at \$125/week for 8 weeks: 4 weeks in October and 4 weeks in March)	
Directors (2)	1,000
Designers (2)	1,000
Artistic directors (2)	12,000
Administrators (2)	12,000
<hr/>	
TOTAL COSTS	\$61,200

REVENUE:

[First Season Revenue, doubled)	37,500
Need (in new subsidies, cash or in-kind):	23,700
i.e.: venue (in kind).....10,000	
publications (in kind)....4,000	
sets (donated material).....2,000	
grants, donations, etc.....\$5,000	
<hr/>	
TOTAL REVENUE	\$61,200

Third Season
1999-2000

By this point, with an increase in ticket prices and attendance from 50/performance to 150/performance, we should begin shifting into paying Equity minimums for most artists, and a living wage (at least \$1000/month) to the two artistic directors and two administrators.

2.2 Budget Prepared for Board Meeting March 22, 1998

March 22, 1998

Budget for balance of season (to end of May 1998)

COSTS

Printing (templates and full brochures).....	1,200
House Programme (overprinting text/ 12 pages).....	200
Printing Posters	50
Print advertising.....	600
Production	1,500
Equity Prepayment	1,100
piano moving	300
stamps	100
promotional photos	100
Misc (tickets, press kits etc.)	100

TOTAL COSTS	\$5,250
Minus Cash on Hand	-2,400

NEED TO RAISE	\$2,850
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FUND-RAISING

Memberships @ \$25

Board sell 10 memberships each (50 memberships)
 or sponsorships of other kinds including line items (i.e. postage, piano moving),
 donations, and cash. (For recognition in house programme and potential for display
 in performance space, depending on size of contribution) \$1,250 +

Executive and ensemble members sell minimum 5 memberships each (50
 memberships) \$1,250 +

Ad sales for programme: should cover the \$200 cost, may connect to larger
 donation with programme ad. \$200

TOTAL RAISED BY MEMBERSHIP	\$2,700 (short \$150)
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CASH FLOW

March 22 to May 15, 1998

Bank Balance 2,400

Immediate Expense

printing 1,200

Bank Balance 1,200

Expenses by end of April

posters printed 50

Production 1,500

stamps (200) 100

photos 100

Bank Balance (-550)

Need to have raised \$550 (above) by end of April

Expenses by end of May 15

(deadline for all moneys raised to allow us to enter the performances without debt.
 Ticket sales over this period will not go into general revenue, but kept separately as
 the co-op fund, and in case of the necessity of disaster/refunds)

Need to have raised the final \$2,300 by May 15

Potential ticket revenue (10 performances at 80-seat capacity)

800 seats at average \$15.....\$1,200 at 100 percent capacity

500 seats at average \$15.....\$7,500 at 62 percent capacity

CO-OP DIVISION OF TICKET REVENUE

(After final performance, May 31)

Idea to equally divide the revenue between all members of the casts and artistic
 teams of the two operas, plus the executive members not included in that list (i.e.
 Michael and Mireille)

As the co-op list now stands:

Voice: director, music director, stage manager, 1 singer	4 people
Doctor: director, music director, stage manager, 4 singers	7 people
Designer	1 person
Technical Director (TBA)	1 person
Michael and Mireille	2 people
<hr/>	
TOTAL CO-OP MEMBERS	15 people

There is a question of the fairness of this arrangement, particularly since most recipients will have worked 60 or 70 hours on the show, while others have put in a great deal more time over the season so far.

There is no conflict here, no complaints about dollars for hours. This is a volunteer effort with the potential for money in the end. No promises to anyone.

However, dollars are limited and increasing the size of this co-op will significantly reduce the small amount that members already will receive (potentially \$500 each).

Mireille, for example, our publicist since October, leaves opera Breve Mid-April. Her replacement (TBA) should be treated as an equal to the other members of the co-op. And what of Mireille's share?

Here 15 goes to 16, and the addition of an executive assistant will water it down more. We could, ideally, find a single person to take on publicity duties (poster distribution, send press packages, pitching stories, group sales, etc.). This person must be recruited. We have some ideas but need more.

With the departure of Mireille, we need a permanent publicist (executive member) and we also need, perhaps after this season ends, an executive assistant (a bookkeeper who can also handle royalties, and take up fund raising activities, both corporate and through government and foundations, along with the executive director)

Again, this person must be recruited. We have an idea, but no promises.

2.3 Final Financial Statement for 1997-98 Season

These figures represent an attempt to reconstruct a season in which bookkeeping was ignored. This rough statement is drawn from the documented deposits and withdrawals that occurred over the course of the season, accompanied by my recollections. The intent of this statement is to provide a general idea of how the first season actually looked, financially.

This statement includes elements of the entire season, including the expenses of the operas, cabarets, and private performances. Revenue includes all the above, plus sponsorships and other donations, both in cash and in kind.

COSTS

Incorporation	100
Postage	200
Fax Machine	500
Demo Tape	100
Photocopying	100
Misc. Supplies and Services	400
Photography	200
Printing	2,000
Print Advertising	300
Opera Production.....	6,700
Wages/Honoraria	11,400
<hr/>	
TOTAL COSTS	\$22,000

REVENUE

Start-Up Funds	600
Earned Income (excluding box-office)	3,500
Fund-raising Performances.....	2,500
Memberships and Donations	4,400
Donations In Kind	8,500
Box Office	2,500
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TOTAL REVENUE	\$22,000

APPENDIX III: PRINT MEDIA (Selected Excerpts)

3.1 The Georgia Straight, Sept. 25-Oct. 2, 1997

"Bravo for breve"

Gone are the days when indulgent royals patronized artists working in sumptuously appointed chambers ... But a new arts company hopes to transform the ballroom of a downtown hotel (venue TBA) into the modern equivalent of those long-gone chambers ... Opera Breve has a specific vision of what today's patrons want to hear in that chamber: the one-act operas written for performance in royal homes for invited audiences.

3.2 The Vancouver Sun, Dec. 22, 1997

"Forst will help plan one-act operas"

Its name means "short opera," but after only two months of operation, Opera Breve has some long talents on board. Literally on the board, that is.

The company ... has, as an honorary board member, internationally famous Vancouver mezzo-soprano Judith Forst.

3.3 The Ubyyssey, November 1997

"Brevity (sic) will be secret to new opera company's success"

By Ronald Nurwisah

[A review of An Opera Breve Hors d'Oeuvre]

The short playing times, and intimate spaces in which the [planned one-act operas] are performed will make going to the opera less intimidating to the newcomer. True opera buffs will rejoice at seeing the birth of a new, young and very different opera company.

The night's performance began with a humorous piece from Bizet's operetta Le Docteur Miracle. The piece quickly set the tone for the night. This company knows how to have fun!

3.4 The Province, Jan. 29, 1998

"A little Puccini with your plonk"

By Damian Inwood

If you fancy a little Verdi with your vodka or Puccini with your plonk, O'Doul's is the bar for you ...

On a recent Sunday, soprano Mari Hahn, Opera Breve's artistic director, soprano Melissa Peabody and bass-baritone Bremner Duthie sang excerpts from Italian opera to about 30 people ...

Peabody, in a slinky cocktail dress, prowled the room singing Musetta's aria, Quando m'en vo, from Puccini's La Boheme ... Hahn, in a soaring soprano, playfully sang Il bacio, The Kiss.

"All sopranos love to kiss and this gives her an excuse to do so," said [MC John] Juliani in his introduction.

Then Hahn worked the room, planting smackers on bar patrons.

3.5 The Vancouver Sun, March 16, 1998

"Opera Breve was too much so in most cases: Spotty and sometimes crude singing characterized the performance at St. Francis in the Wood. Vancouver Early Music fared much better."

By Lloyd Dykk

[The] concept was strange, excerpting works that are already too brief to be excerptable. You rarely got the sense of even these brief things. It felt like a vest-pocket version of X-treme Opera, Vancouver Opera's lamentable hit parade of arias and scenes.

It didn't work in the church for the simple reason that you couldn't see much for peoples' [sic] heads. It sounded and looked "little theatre." The spotty, sometimes crude, singing suggested the company has some way to go if it wants to be taken seriously in a competitive market, but judgment at this point may be premature ...

Baritone Andrew Greenwood sounded promising and soprano Mari Hahn was the most consistent singer of the five on display. The rest should maybe keep up their lessons in private.

3.6 The Vancouver Sun, May 19, 1998

"Unconvincing La Voix Humaine fails to resound as a cri de coeur: The Francis Poulenc Opera should be emotionally wrenching, but the Opera Breve production with Mari Hahn just left its audience feeling embarrassed"

By Lloyd Dykk

Francis Poulenc's opera La Voix Humaine (The Human Voice) is emotional grand guignol ...

Emotional truth, refined by beauty, silences criticism of rawness.

If you happen to have the original recording of the opera with the soprano Denise Duval and Georges Pretre conducting the orchestra of the Theatre National de l'Opera Comique, it will be hard to revisit Opera Breve's tab version in English in a production that began on Friday in a hotel ballroom with a lone piano standing in for the orchestra and a soprano (Mari Hahn) who sings well enough but rarely moved me.

It's denuded of colour. The opera was designed for a large but economically used [sic] orchestra. A pianist, even playing well, as Sonia Kim did, can't be expected to supply that colour. And much of the music is inherent in French syllables. An English translation is only a compromise. I don't know what Opera Breve was thinking...

Director John Juliani stages the action adroitly, but staging in-the-round doesn't work when the sight of other audience members intrudes on that private bedroom [setting] ... The audience looked stiff and embarrassed. Opera Breve needs to rethink its presentation, maybe tying it with a dinner package ... After 45 minutes of compromise, I thought, is that all there is?

3.7 The Province, May 20, 1998

"Brief operas good idea that needs fine tuning"

By Damian Inwood

Opera Breve's opening season of salon-set one-act operas is a brave attempt that's in need of fine-tuning ...

The problem is that, on its own, neither show makes for a fully satisfying evening.

You can't help feeling that if both operas were performed each night, they'd provide a more balanced musical menu ...

Accompanied by pianist Sonia Kim, [Mari] Hahn [in The Human Voice] does a good job negotiating a mostly monochromatic monologue ...

Movement is the least of the problems facing Dr. Miracle, an opera that Bizet wrote when he was 18.

It gallops along full of sight gags, waggling eyebrows, slapstick and over-acting ...

Sopranos Melissa Peabody and Alexandra Tait's voices blend smoothly a mother and daughter.

But baritone Andrew Greenwood ... sometimes lacks sufficient volume to carry him through.

Tenor Adam Kozak ... is fine comic actor ... but his technique is inconsistent.

Dr. Miracle is worth seeing, however, for a hysterical sequence involving the whole cast and a huge omelette.

3.8 West End Times, May 22, 1998

"Hot tickets for intimate evenings"

By Louise Phillips

West Enders don't have to go far for Opera Breve, a salon-style entertainment staged on weekends in May beneath the ornate chandelier in the intimate ballroom at O'Doul's Listel Hotel on Robson ... [Mari] Hahn, imaginatively directed by John Juliani (with musical direction by Sonia Kim), sings the role [in The Human Voice] with unerring elegance and just the right amount of restrained emotion.

3.9 Vancouver Echo, June 10, 1998

"Critic charts new course"

By Ross McLaren

As an acclaimed theater critic, more than one production felt the barb of [Michael Groberman's] pen, more than one outraged director, actor or ticket-holder returned in kind ...

So when Groberman decided to change careers last year, it was ironic that he chose to open an arts company, one that would leave him vulnerable to printed brickbats.

"I spent a lot of time listening to people in performing arts company (sic) complain that it was impossible to run a company in Vancouver's financial climate ... It always struck me that it wasn't so"

The result of his labor is Operabreve (sic) ...

In its first season, Operabreve performed ... in the hotel ballroom of Listel Vancouver. The season closed on a break-even financial footing.

3.10 Opera Canada, Fall 1998, Vol. 39

"World Report: Reviews of opera from around the world"

[Vancouver Reviews]

By Floyd St. Clair

A flurry of activities outside the [Vancouver Opera] included ... a self-directed group of young performers calling themselves Opera Breve, with, amongst other offerings, a sparkling production of Bizet's Dr. Miracle by Kico Gonzalez-Risso, as well as performances of La Voix Humaine, all in a local hotel ballroom in the month of May ...

[In Modern Baroque Opera's production of Scipione,] baritone Andrew Greenwood (Ernardo) was a pillar of strength, as indeed he was earlier with the Opera Breve Bizet.