



DENNIS HANTHORN - *Zurich General Director*

## IO-II NEWS

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## The University of Kentucky and The Atlanta Opera Launch New Projection Technology

### Images and Video Will Create a Virtual Environment that Substitutes for Onstage Set Design

The University of Kentucky's Center for Visualization and Virtual Environments (VIS Center) has developed a method of rear projection that will change the future of theatrical scenic stage design. The technology called SCRIBE (an acronym for self-contained rapidly integratable background environment) creates very large rear projections using only minimal backstage area and movable screen units. SCRIBE utilizes a software system that seamlessly blends high-definition projections into one image. Multiple projectors, attached to two large movable fabric screen units, take up less than five feet of space, freeing the rest of the stage for singers, and ensuring that light will not be disrupted.

The VIS Center's high-definition projection technology, originally developed for non-theatrical use, was used for the first time in a theatrical setting for a University of Kentucky Opera Theatre production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. The Atlanta Opera then became the first professional opera company to use the new technology for performances of the opera Feb. 26-March 6, 2011 at The Cobb Energy Centre in Atlanta, Georgia. Discussions are already underway to license this technology. The use of this projection system continues to draw interest from other opera and theatre companies around the country.

While front and rear projected backdrops are nothing new to theatre, they can cause problems for the set design and for the performers. Normal front projectors can cast shadows and images onto the performers, and normal rear projectors must be placed very far distances behind the screens to create a large enough image of scenery, which can limit the stage space. With the VIS Center's new rear projection system only four and a half feet separate the 54 projector units from their attached moveable fabric screen units, which are an impressive 24x30' and 24x15'.

"This is ground-breaking scenic technology for the theatre" says Dr. Everett McCorvey of The University of Kentucky Opera Theatre. "The possibilities for scenic elements using the technology are limitless. Using scenic content like this is just the first of many ways that the scenic technology may be used in opera, theatre and many other parts of the performing arts industry."

The images can be modified to be unique to each production. For this production of *Porgy and Bess*, images and video footage of real locations in Charleston, S.C., and the islands off the coast of North Carolina were taken and edited by the VIS Center team, led by set designer Richard Kagey, a long-time collaborator with The Atlanta Opera. Actual hurricane footage from *The Weather Channel* was used to depict scenes in which the characters are overwhelmed by a hurricane. Combining these projected images with a minimal amount of three-dimensional pieces of scenery can create vibrant and exciting productions.

The technology, originally developed at the VIS Center through a partnership with Fort Knox, was designed with the goal of building rapidly deployable, high-resolution screens to be used in military training. Incorporating this type of technology with its vivid images and video into opera productions presents stunning prospects for depicting opera's rich and intricate story lines and settings. This technology has great potential for the future of theatrical staging as a whole as it can lower production costs, create high-definition experiences, and provide easy set mobility.

"We have been investigating projection technology for some time," comments Dennis Hanthorn, Zurich General Director of The Atlanta Opera, "but it has been too costly until now. The VIS Center's cutting-edge technology is easily applicable to a stage environment and will allow us to create unique productions that I believe will be very engaging for audiences. We are thrilled about this new production and hope to be able to use this technology many times in the future."

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[SEE VIDEO ABOUT THE PRODUCTION](#)

[SEE DENNIS HANTHORN, RICHARD KAGEY, AND EVERETT MCCORVEY DISCUSS THE PROJECT](#)

[SEE VIDEO OF REAR-PROJECTION UNITS BEING ASSEMBLED](#)