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**The Atlanta Opera Has Arrived**

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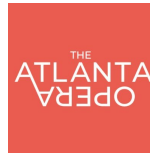


As it approaches its 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the 2024-25 season, the Atlanta Opera joins Opera America’s official “Budget One” status for opera companies with budgets of \$15 million and above. There are but ten of them, out of 180 or so, and the category can lend a national spotlight.

Achieving the milestone is easily traceable to the ten-year tenure of [Tomer Zvulun](#) as general and artistic director. Not that the bar was high to start with, but the facts speak for themselves: When Zvulun arrived in 2013, the budget was \$5 million with a deficit of \$1.8 million in 2012; the endowment was at \$5M. The company offered 12 performances of three mainstage operas. Today the budget is \$15 million, the endowment \$16 million, with 29 performances of six operas, along with live-stream, film, and in-school offerings. Plus, a “96-Hour Opera” Festival provides a forum for composers and librettists from underrecognized groups to tell their stories through opera. Audiences have doubled in the last ten years and the company has remained in the black for the last eight.

Board Chair Rhys Wilson credits Zvulun, pointing to “strong fundraising efforts” and “tight spending controls,” along with an “increased caliber of the productions and the artists, both singers and musicians.” He also notes how operations continued during the pandemic—in alternative ways—enabling the group to “keep our staff, donors, and patrons, [and] to provide needed jobs to over 150 artists.”

Asked about achieving Budget One status, Zvulun responds, “This is not about budget, this is about a spirit of a company. I am proud to be a part of a team whose culture is so resilient and resourceful, people who refuse to be defeated by obstacles and convert them instead into springboards.”



Zvulun cites recent “immense challenges,” including Covid-19, racial tensions, and the general economic challenges of the field. He further points out how during the pandemic, the company was the first to use its [scene shop to create protective masks and gowns](#), how it offered [operas in a circus tent](#), how its 96-Hour Festival is designed as a way for the underrepresented to be heard. He mentions as well the emphasis on new work and new audiences, noting how 70 percent of attendees at last summer’s *The Shining*, by composer Paul Moravec, had never been to an opera before. The education outreach has grown from 20,000 students to 70,000 students over the past few years.

Also new in the last decade are coproductions such as *The Shining*, Jake Hegge’s *Dead Man Walking*, Kevin Puts’s *Silent Night*, Mason Bates’s [R]evolution of *Steve Jobs*, and the start of the first Wagner *Ring* cycle in the southeast. That continues in April with *Die Walküre*; other works in spring of 2024 are *La bohème*, Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and, in June, the 96-Hour Opera Festival.

It appears that the Atlanta Opera has arrived.

Pictured: Atlanta Opera General and Artistic Director Tomer Zvulun

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