

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS MANAGERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE SHOW MUST GO ON!

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Abstract: *The paper presents the results of a qualitative survey based on interviews about several best management practices used by the cultural institutions managers to mitigate the negative effects on the arts world of the crisis generated by the COVID 19 pandemic. This crisis has generated a continuously changing new reality characterized by several highly new obstacles. For the managers and employees of cultural institutions it presented strong challenges to insure their survival. Some of them were treating the crisis as an opportunity to identify and develop new, creative and highly innovative solutions to continuing to provide access to artistic events, mainly during the lockdown period of the pandemic. We have identified solutions like online concerts, transmitting shows and concerts on radio and TV, using shows from the archives, online museum tours. These provided joy in hard times to members of the public, hope and motivation, being a way to escape the dark and sad reality. Our results indicate that cultural institutions managers made bold and difficult decisions to continue to fulfill the mission of their organizations, to provide cultural, artistic services to their public. Together with their employees, they identified new ways to relate with the consumers of their artistic services when they were forbidden access in public places, including in concert halls, opera, theaters. One conclusion is that they were driven by the need to protect the health of the public and artists and by their strong desire to help the public to revive their feeling of human interaction through the power of the arts. Another important conclusion is that they had a rapid reaction approach to managing the totally unexpected crisis generated by the COVID 19 pandemic which proved to be effective in mitigating its highly negative impact.*

Key words: *development, pandemic, adaptation, changes, decisions*

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus crisis was a complex phenomenon that almost the entire planet faced over the course of two years, creating a constantly changing reality. Any serious disruption, such as the one created by the COVID-19 pandemic, affects a company's performance, according to what Sheffi & Rice Jr. [15] call a "disruption profile." To maintain continuity, businesses had to adapt to the pandemic through crisis or risk management [13].

These years were about survival, challenges, opportunities for development, but above all about creativity. They were the years of truly new potentials and experiences. "Practically, every crisis contains both the seeds of success and the roots of failure. Finding, cultivating, and capitalizing on potential success is the essence of crisis management." [10]. Against this background, opportunities for innovation were fertile ground for those who had the courage to look beyond the obvious obstacles. "There is a need for an accelerated innovation process, with a redesigned innovation journey, not just compressed in time." [12] The pandemic has shown, without fail, the importance of art in our lives. Online concerts, broadcasts of performances, concerts, theatre from the archives, and online tours of museums have been moments of joy in difficult times, being like an escape from the dark reality around people, but, at the same time, a horizon of hope and motivation. The priority of the stakeholders was to continue to pay the artists and employees and to maintain a minimum level of activity by using digital technologies, because of the "inventiveness shock" of the crisis. Creativity has resulted in connecting the previously unconnected in new and engaging ways. The years of the Coronavirus

pandemic will surely go down in history as the years when cultural managers understood the importance of creativity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The paper presents the results of a qualitative survey based on interviews about several best management practices used by the cultural institutions managers to mitigate the negative effects on the arts world of the crisis generated by the COVID 19 pandemic. This study is an attempt to demonstrate that no matter how difficult and unexpected the pandemic period was, it also constituted an unprecedented opportunity for change for artists and managers to break down the traditional barriers of performance and re-imagine the future of the opera, turning the obstacle into a new opportunity [7].

It is the sign of a change that appears to us simultaneously as a form of failure and the possibility of innovation.

It took a critical environment, like the one triggered by the pandemic, to force artists and artistic managers to find a new way and make the necessary adjustments. From the first month of the pandemic, opera managers, like those in non-artistic fields, understood that they were experiencing a change, which appeared simultaneously as both a failure and a possibility for innovation [1]. They were forced to embrace change, they learned to think more flexibly, to decide on programs and repertoire in a shorter time, moving away from two to three years of advance planning.

The degree of innovation was determined, mainly, by three aspects: the size of the institution, its degree of flexibility, and the ability and vision of the manager. The ability to take risks and innovate have largely determined the performance of especially small and medium-sized enterprises [11].

How did the best managers respond to the pandemic? With rapid innovation. Both for the immediate moment and for the future. According to the American sociologist Everett Rogers, innovation is communicated through certain channels between members of society, a phenomenon called diffusion. Based on this theory, innovations can have different S-shaped diffusion curves, and different members of the community can be classified into five types: innovators, early adopters, early majority, later majority, and latecomers [14]. Some managers saw the COVID-19 pandemic from the first months as an opportunity to gain quick action on long-standing domestic challenges. They saw an opportunity in not wasting a crisis. They quickly adapted to the uncertainty, continuing their activity under the given circumstances. We quote Nikolaus Bachler [8], former director of the Bayerische Staatsoper (Munich) during the pandemic, currently in charge of the Osterfestspiele Salzburg: *“No, I don’t want to go back (i.e., to the old reality)! I wish for a vibrant and open future.”*

For the institutions they manage to remain relevant to their audiences instead of putting their foot on the brakes, some managers have had the courage to come before the public in new ways of presentation, creating new things after hundreds of years of unaltered operatic tradition. The consequences of the pandemic, as difficult as they were, created the opportunity to put aside some of the obstacles and take risks, breaking down long-standing barriers.

Also, responsible, agile managers succeeded, during the crisis, in actively preparing for a very different future. Although live performance has returned safely after the pandemic, the innovations discovered since 2020 are destined to be part of the arts industry for years to come.

Managers of cultural institutions were forced to make decisions to best serve their institution. This was the optimal time to be innovative. They had to find new ways. Did they manage to be creative and imaginative?

RESEARCH RESULTS

In the following lines, some innovative ways that some managers have approached to maintain communication with consumers who were forbidden or had limited access to concert halls, with those who were afraid to leave their homes, and, at the same time, to help audiences regain a sense of human interaction without sacrificing the health and safety of artists and audiences are presented. Small-scale or outdoor performances have become a venue for innovative and creative ways to overcome lockdown and social distancing measures [3]. Also, a more intense capitalization of the intervention of private sector operators is highlighted.

1. Adapted Opera

Due to the restrictions imposed, the managers, together with the directors, set designers and the other artists made changes to the text, duration, or stage adaptation of established operas, so that they could present performances. During the period when public access to the theatres was prohibited, the General Manager of Teatro Liceu de Barcelona, Valentini Oviedo, organized the musical event *Consierto para el Bioceno* [2]. It was the first concert organized in Spain after the lifting of the state of emergency on 22 June 2020. As public access was prohibited in the performance halls, plants filled the 2929 seats of the auditorium.

In the same key, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, under the direction of Iván Fischer (the founder and Music Director) performed four parts of G. Mahler's 7th *Symphony*, for an audience of fish and stuffed toys. The concert was also streamed online.

The manager of the Vienna State Opera, Bogdan Roscic, decided to open the opera to the public, during the period when performances were prohibited, as an Architecture Museum [5].

Covid fan tutte was a production conceived and created by the management of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet from Helsinki, based on the famous opera *Così fan tutte* by W. A. Mozart. Even the title of the opera was adapted from *Così fan tutte* to *Covid fan tutte*.

Another modified version of the same Mozartian opera was presented by the Pittsburgh Opera in October 2020. The managers of the opera made important changes so that the performances could take place. First, they reduced the number of spectators to 52, and the action of the production was set in the year 1918, during the Spanish flu. That is why all the performers on stage wore masks.

In the 1 hour and 50-minute condensed version of L. van Beethoven's *Fidelio*, presented by the Garsington Opera Festival, the scenery was completely removed, these being suggested by the film playing in the background. Another effect trick was to pre-record the inmate choir and play it on a large zoom screen and mix it with a live orchestra and only three singers on stage. The orchestra was reduced to 13 instrumentalists placed at the required distance from each other.

Safe at the Greek National Opera or Mozart in a Time of Corona was an interesting project of the management of the Greek National Opera Athena, launched in October 2020. It is a video explaining the new social distancing measures imposed by the Greek government and the rules that must be followed when entering the opera, to the music of the famous aria *Madamina, il catalogo è questo* from the opera *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart.

Teatro Comunale in Bologna presented the series of performances of *Madama Butterfly* by G. Puccini (October 18, 20, and 21, 2020), without the women's chorus from the first act, because a case of illness of a chorister was detected.

2. Drive-In / Float-In Shows

Because live performances in closed spaces (performance halls) were banned, some opera managers (and others) chose open-air events because – by virtue of lower transmission rates – they offered greater prospects for an earlier and safer restart [3,9].

One of the ideas was the drive-in show as the new way of presenting shows.

Drive-in shows took place in parking lots, or in specially arranged spaces, and the audience watched the show from their own cars. Float-in shows also developed in the same system, with the difference that the audience took place in boats, not in cars, and the venue was a lake, river, etc., and not a parking lot.

In the first period of the pandemic, only recordings were presented through these systems, but after gaining trust and experience, live performances were also performed.

A *Covid fan tutte version* to the music of Mozart was thought of as a drive-in installation. It was a project of the Pacific Opera Project (POP) management, Los Angeles, CA. Another Pacific Opera drive-in project was Ch. W. Gluck's one-act opera, *La Corona*. The Pacific Opera Project management also created a drive-in live concept in a parking lot with a capacity of 90 vehicles. The cast was made up of three real-life couples who were quarantined together before the shows.

The drive-in also featured San Francisco Opera, CA in the Fort Mason drive-in. The recordings chosen were *La Bohème* by G. Puccini, with Angela Gheorghiu and Piotr Beczala, production from 2009, presented on 20 and 22 November 2020 and *Tosca*, with Adrienne Pieczonka, and later in the spring of 2021 (April, May), SF also presented two series of live drive-in performances, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* by G. Rossini, and *The Adlers: Live at the Drive-In*, a live outdoor concert featuring music by Mozart, Puccini, Verdi, Lehár, etc.

The management of the English National Opera (ENO) in London, UK also developed a drive-in concept, *ENO Drive & Live*, realized in a parking lot with a capacity of 300 cars.

The first float-in project belonged to the English National Opera management. It was a floating cinema in London, made on the Regent Canal: 18 boats were made available, with a total capacity of 128 people.

3. The Artistic and Technical Staff of the Operas, Involved in Other Activities

3.1. Artists Involved in Post-COVID Recovery

One of the symptoms of Covid-19, this major global challenge [4], was the loss of lung capacity. This could be fixed by singing. According to the project, while they are sick with COVID-19, but also during the recovery period, patients are taught to breathe correctly. Opera singers know how to use costo-diaphragmatic breathing, to use the entire capacity of the lung in the breathing process, not just the upper part, as most of the world does.

Because of the restrictions, the performances were suspended, and the artists made themselves useful to society by making their knowledge available to those who needed it.

ENO Breathe was the first project of its kind in the world: it belongs to the management of English National Opera. *ENO Breathe* brings together the medical expertise and musical science of opera soloists to create a comprehensive rehabilitation program, or medicine and music met in a series of fun and imaginative breathing exercises [6].

We Breathe Together was a project like the first one, carried out by Romanian opera artists, coordinated by the mezzo-soprano Aura Twarowska, together with the infectious disease Dr Virgil Musta, from the Clinical Hospital for Infectious Diseases and Pneumoftisiology Dr Victor Babeş Timișoara.

3.2. Tailoring Departments Made Masks and Sheets for Hospitals

This is example of the Huston Grand Opera, in whose sewing workshops masks were made and then donated to St. Joseph's Medical Centre.

3.3. Artists for Artists

A special aspect during the pandemic was the way in which artists jumped to the aid of their disadvantaged colleagues. *San Francisco Opera* held a costume sale to raise funds to support artists, technicians and administrators affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The famous German-born violinist *Anne Sophie Mutter* initiated, in the winter of 2020, a series of concerts in churches to raise funds for artists, standing up as a strong voice against the fact that churches were open but theatres were not.

Daniel Barenboim conducted a Charity Concert for the benefit of musicians left without jobs. The concert took place at the *Staatsoper Unter den Linden* in Berlin. *Sing for Hope* is a Winter Holiday 2020 initiative that took place online and featured world celebrities, opera singers and Broadway stars. All proceeds were transferred to artists without income during the pandemic. And international tenor *Jonas Kaufmann* donated, following his *Meet Stars Live* in Concert recital, 5,000 Euros to artists facing financial problems during the COVID-19 crisis.

4. Partnerships

By looking for new ways to keep in touch with the public and performing in unconventional places and forms, new partnerships were also born, which, before the pandemic, were not considered.

Zacharie James on Broadway is a performance produced by Des Moines Metro Opera (DMMO) in partnership with a caterer, Tangerine Foods. Another new partnership was with UBER, through the creation of *Uber boxes* for drive-in performances by the English National Opera, a concept later taken up by many theatres and opera companies. The innovative management of the same opera house (ENO) also created a partnership with *Lime* (electric scooter transport company) for cycling enthusiasts.

5. Open Air Shows/Unconventional Spaces

This is the method most used by opera management during the pandemic. They continued to deliver shows to the faithful public, outside the comfort of the theatre and the luxury of the opera stage. If the people were not allowed to go to the music, the music went to them!

The NY Phil Classical Bandwagon is the project thought *outside of the box* by the management of the New York Philharmonic, a bandwagon that moves to different neighbourhoods in New York every weekend. Mainly Mozart organized the *Holiday Balcony Concert* series at the Westgate Hotel. Guests were able to enjoy the concert from the safety of their hotel room balcony, overlooking the stage located in front of the Westgate Hotel's Fountain Terrace.

Molly Blank Big Tent is the title of the series of performances presented by the management of the Atlanta Opera, in an enormous tent (the Atlanta Opera Tent). It has a capacity of 240 seats and is designed without side walls, ensuring the constant circulation of fresh air, but at the same time offering protection to the public against the weather.

Car concerts represented an innovative way to continue rehearsals and even to hold performances, with choral ensembles, which represented the most disadvantaged segment during the pandemic. For this type of project, parking lots or other open spaces were rented, and the cars, with audio and amplification installations, were arranged in a semicircle (with each chorister in his own car). The Luminous Voices choir from Alberta, USA, is an example of this. And famed director and manager Tomer Zvulun (Atlanta

Opera) presented performances of *The Threepenny Carmen* and *The Threepenny Opera* in a parking lot at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, for the latter using puppets from the Centre for Puppetry Arts as a “cast.”

The well-known opera *Rigoletto* by G. Verdi, proposed by the Tulsa Opera management, was a fascinating staging at the intersection of Italian opera and American baseball and was held at ONEOK Field Stadium.

Pop-Up Opera Track is the name of the tour initiated by the Washington National Opera management and which presented open-air performances in various locations: parks, gardens, squares, medical centers, etc. Another *Pop-Up Opera* tour was also organized by Scottish Opera management, comprising three 30-minute titles – *A Little Bit of Don Giovanni*, *A Little Bit of Gondoliers*, and *The Song of the Clyde* – created especially for this tour.

The management of the Copenhagen Opera Festival 2020 has thought of 100 opera moments, offered to the residents of Copenhagen, over the course of 5 days: 20 small musical groups were formed, performing a short opera program of 15 minutes. Copenhagen streets, canals, squares, schools, hospitals or even houses were chosen as locations.

The beloved Glyndebourne Opera Festival had to cancel the 2020 edition, but Artistic Director Stephen Langridge came up with an innovative idea, embraced by the entire management team: because there was a lot of green space in Glyndebourne that could be made available to the festival, starting in July 2020 the city opened its gardens for a season of outdoor concerts and performances. It was the first time that Glyndebourne was performed in an open space.

Love in the Park is called the Philadelphia Opera Chorus management project, made in five episodes. The project was filmed in Dilworth Park near Philadelphia City Hall.

An avant-garde staging, adapted to the sanitary conditions of the pandemic and realized in a multi-story parking lot, was *Twilight: Gods*, a special, shortened production of the opera *Götterdämmerung* by Richard Wagner, directed by the Artistic Director of the Detroit Opera, Yuval Sharon. The different acts of the opera were mounted on different floors of the parking lot, i.e., the audience moved, in their own cars, from one floor to another.

Barn Opera, a private opera company in Brandon, USA, has asked the city of Vermont for permission to use a basketball court during the pandemic to present performances under conditions imposed by social distancing. The company spent hours marking out a huge grid of 10×10 marked squares using spray-painted lines.

The Bayerische Staatsoper Muenchen, under the direction of Nikolaus Bachler, presented adapted performances in every corner of the building, including a horn concert for an audience of 10, held in the cellar below the main stage.

6. Footage from Their Own Homes

Particularly during the first period of the pandemic, in 2020, when the restrictions were very severe, the model of online appearances from the artists' own homes was launched.

The Metropolitan Opera NY Management's *At-Home Gala* was an unprecedented live gala which took place on April 25, 2020. Hosted by General Director Peter Gelb from New York and Music Director Yannick Nézet-Séguin from Montreal, the virtual event brought together over 40 of the world's greatest opera artists, who performed from their homes, from 14 different countries. This gala was one of the first broadcasts of its kind, with Peter Gelb and the Met Opera cementing their status as innovators.

The lyrical tragedy *La voix humaine*, opera with one character, composed by Francis Poulenc in 1957, on the text – monologue on the telephone – by Jean Cocteau, was the innovation of the Welsh National Opera management. The opera's only character, Elle, was played by soprano Claire Booth. The filming was done entirely in the soprano's home, in Oxfordshire, UK, and the props and the decor were made up only of the artist's personal items.

A Feast in a Time of Plague also piqued the interest of the management team at Teatro Municipal Rio de Janeiro. The team chose Cesar Cui's musical version, based on Pushkin's text, translated into Portuguese by Irineu Franco Perpetuo. It was about a recording made during the quarantine, without the protagonists leaving the isolation.

7. Compositions during the Pandemic

The field of music composition also was very active during the pandemic, with many new creations being composed during the isolation period. Here are some examples:

A Feast in a Time of Plague premiered by Grange Park Opera on 12/13 September 2020, under the direction of Mrs Vasfi Kani, is considered the first British opera composed during the lockdown. The music is by Alex Woolf and the libretto and direction by Sir David Pountney. Pountney's libretto is based on a fragment of Pushkin's *Little Tragedy*, written in 1830.

Eight Songs From Isolation (or the Globetrotting Opera, as *The Times* calls it) is an opera composed by Oliver Zeffman. This opera has not one composer, but 8, each of them choosing a text about isolation and composing music based on lived experiences. The famous artistic impresario agency, Askonas Holt, presents this opera, which premiered on September 50, 2020

Interstate is a 2021 production by Minnesota Opera Management. The music is composed by Kamala Sankharam, and Kathleen Kelly and Jennifer Cresswell are co-librettists. The creators and protagonists of this production sought new ways to promote the mission of art and provide everyone with access to an innovative opera.

8. Replacing the Great Traditional Operas with Operas of Short Duration and Few Characters to Comply with Sanitary Norms

The management of some opera houses understood the need to adapt the repertoire to the new pandemic normality. So, the lavish productions staged in normal times were abandoned and replaced by smaller, more intimate ones. They were made on a small enough scale to keep all the artists safe.

In the second year of the pandemic, the Romanian National Opera in Timișoara staged a premiere in compliance with the provisions regarding the imposed sanitary norms: *La serva padrona* by G.B. Pergolesi. The premiere took place on May 15, 2021, and the tickets on sale covered only 50% of the performance hall's capacity. The show had a small artistic staff, with only 3 soloists on stage, a small orchestra, and no choir.

Florida Grand Opera presented 4 short operas by American 20th century-composers brought together under the *Season of Specials and Shorts* genre: *Three Decembers* by Jake Heggie, *New York Stories* by David Hagen, *Trouble in Tahiti* by Leonard Bernstein, and *Signor Deluso* by Thomas Pasatieri.

9. Improvements / Repairs

The managers who promptly understood the context triggered by the pandemic crisis decided to use the time when live shows were banned to carry out renovation, modernization works of the premises.

Andrea Zietzschmann, the new director of the Berliner Philharmonie, used the lockdown periods to do some repair and maintenance works that would normally be crammed into the summer holidays.

Anthony Freud, General Director of the Lyric Opera Chicago, performed a complete change of seats in the 92-year-old opera house during the summer of 2020. These changes resulted in better accessibility and comfort, and the acoustics of the hall remained unchanged.

Dominique Meyer, Sovrintendente of Teatro alla Scala, used the lockdown period to digitize the theatre's music library, giving up paper scores and ensuring access to electronic scores.

The Board of Directors of the Paris Opera (Directeur General Stéphane Lissner) also decided for this transition period to carry out renovation works, starting on July 15, 2020, both at the Garnier, the architectural jewel of Paris, and at the Opéra Bastille. These works were originally scheduled for the 2021 offseason.

10. Contractual Adjustments

Even in times of pandemic, the mission of opera houses cannot be changed. However, even though managers must be creative, all their decisions must be viewed through the lens of fiscal sustainability.

Many managers have set themselves the goal of balancing the budgets of the houses they manage by the 2024-2025 season. Alexander Neef, for example, plans not to replace all retiring employees in the coming period, and to pay newcomers less than their predecessors. He also plans to address a renegotiation of collective agreements.

To compensate for the lost revenue, the Houston Grand Opera announced that it would cut its staff by 27%, and for those who remained, a 15% pay cut was decided.

Ryan Taylor, President, and CEO Minnesota Opera was forced to reduce the number of employees, ultimately affecting 11% of the full-time staff. In addition, the remaining staff work with a 15% reduction in salary level. Existing contract and part-time contract employee hours were also reduced by an average of 61% in line with updated operational and production needs.

11. Promptness and Speed of Reaction Were Essential in Starting The Process of Adapting to The New Situation

Metropolitan Opera NY, through general director Peter Gelb, made the difficult decision in March 2020 to cancel the rest of the 2019-2020 season due to the escalation of the pandemic and to lay off its workforce (employees were sent home without compensation, but with paid medical insurance).

Verbier Festival & Academy, through Artistic and Executive Director Martin T'son Engstroem, was among the first major festivals in Switzerland to cancel the 2020 edition.

12. Examples of Good Management Practices in Romania during the COVID-19 Pandemic Restrictions

The *George Enescu Bucharest Philharmonic* presented the 9th *Symphony* by L. van Beethoven in the Great Hall of the Romanian Athenaeum, which was only 50% occupied by the public because of the pandemic restrictions. On the stage of the Athenaeum, only the orchestra was arranged, with social distancing imposed, which was also considerably

reduced (up to approximately 50% chords), the choir (also numerically reduced) was arranged in the side boxes of the hall, and the soloists in the stage box, the right side. The musical direction of the evening was provided by the British conductor Leo Hussain, and the soloists were Diana Țugui, Aura Twarowska, Daniel Magdal, and Ionuț Pascu.

From the Romanian National Opera Cluj-Napoca, three examples of good management practices:

The premiere of *Faust* by Ch. Gounod – the first test concert since the start of the pandemic, on May 15, 2021, soloists George Petean and Ștefan Pop. Fully vaccinated people and non-vaccinated people, but who proved a negative result of the test for the detection of COVID-19, had access to the show. All the participants, about 200 people, including the mayor Emil Boc, wore a protective mask.

The *Together for Christmas* concert took place on December 19, 2021 and had as soloists the tenors Cristian Mogoșan and Eusebiu Huțan and the baritones Florin Estefan and Cristian Hodrea, coordinated by maestro Octavian Lup. The concert was held with the participation of the public up to 50% of the maximum capacity of the hall and only for people who proved vaccination through the digital certificates of the European Union regarding COVID-19.

Opera Summer Hub was a unique program on Romania's cultural scene, initiated during the pandemic, co-organized by the Romanian National Opera from Cluj-Napoca together with CREIC – the Regional Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries. The project had two events: *Opera Picnic*, with access for 500 people in the Cluj Industrial Innovation Park, and *Opera à la Carte*, for 100 people, held at Londoner, a well-known brand on the HoReCa market.

In March 2021, the vocal-symphonic opera *Stabat Mater* by G.B. Pergolesi took place at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Joseph in Bucharest. It took place without an audience, but was broadcast on the Signis Romania (Catholic Association for Audio-Visual Communication) Facebook page and on YouTube. The soloists were the soprano Veronica Anușca and the mezzo-soprano Aura Twarowska, and the New Hope Ensemble provided the orchestral part. This was a project carried out at the initiative of the musicians and hosted by the Roman Catholic cathedral.

CONCLUSIONS

It is obvious that all opera managers tried to keep their institution financially viable during the difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some succeeded, going through the pandemic with all employees, others had to reduce staff, give up new productions, reduce the number of famous guests, etc., and some institutions even disbanded. What remains important in the history of the opera is that it survived this ordeal. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has made previous developments in the field of opera seem frozen in time. Opera houses around the world, faced with an unprecedented situation, had to reinvent themselves overnight to survive. Three important aspects stand out from this study: 1) The management of medium and small theatres was much more flexible, agile, and innovative compared to large theatres with strong brands; 2) The management of theatres in the West (USA, Great Britain) were much more prompt in implementing new practices and breaking the barriers of traditionalism than those in Eastern Europe; 3) During the pandemic, the focus shifted from institutions to artists, who took the initiative more strongly than ever before. The transformations that took place during the pandemic are irreversible, and most likely the lessons learned during this period (flexibility and adoption of unconventional solutions) will become rules of good practice in times of

normality. The world of opera demonstrated in the pandemic that limits exist to be overcome!

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