

Moving the opera from concert halls to shopping malls

By SANDY MCLEAN
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The newly-appointed artistic director of the Mississauga City Centre Opera wants to take opera out of the theatre and into the malls, schools and auditoriums.

As Dwight Bennet begins to develop the opera's repertoire for the next three years, he hopes to appeal to audiences of all ages. He's determined to attract a broader range of audiences from children and high school students to adults and seniors.

"We need to make it approachable, affordable and an exciting thing to do and to become part of Mississauga's identity," Bennett said. "Opera's a very fast-growing art form in Ontario. With a community the size of Mississauga — and it's still growing — there shouldn't be a problem attracting audiences. The sky is the limit for that."

Bringing over 20 years of conducting experience with him, Bennett feels it's a good time to take another look at the opera's future direction.

"There's a lot to learn about the Mississauga City Centre Opera, like where it should go and where people want to see it go," he said.



DWIGHT BENNET

Bennett was hired as the new artistic director, he said, because the opera wanted someone who is still working the circuit as a conductor.

"I do a lot of guest conducting. Hopefully, I can bring my experience to the opera," he said, glad of the opportunity to catch his breath. "I've been on the road for 18 years. A week here, three weeks there."

As a father of two children aged 3 and 4, it's a good time to settle down just a bit. He'll still guest conduct for various symphonies across Canada and the United States, but not as often.

Formerly musical director and conductor with the Windsor Symphony Orchestra and before that the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra, Bennett is thrilled to be immersed in opera now.

"Opera has always been my first love. I always conducted for symphonies and guest conducted for operas. Now it's going to be the other way around, which is great," he said.

After studying music and conducting in Toronto and the United States, and receiving his B.A. and M.A., Bennett went on to study at Siena, a famous conducting school in Italy. From there he travelled to London and Amsterdam to further his training.

He is aiming to get the best possible cast, something he doesn't see as a problem because most Canadian singers live in the Metro Toronto area.

His first production as artistic director is *From Opera To Broadway*, a fund-raising effort for the opera, starring Mark DuBois, Suzanne Kompass, Eleanor Calbes and the Mississauga City Centre Opera

Chorus. Calbes, founder of the City Centre Opera, will sing a duet with acclaimed tenor DuBois.

The production will feature music from *Les Miserable*, *The Phantom Of The Opera*, the operettas of Lahr and Strauss and the operas of Puccini, Verdi and Bizet. The music of Cole Porter, Rogers & Hammerstein, Gerome Kern and Leonard Bernstein will also be performed.

"We're making it very light, informal, and fun," Bennett said of the production.

Show times are April 2-3 at 8 p.m. and April 4 at 2 p.m. Tickets cost \$22 for adults and \$18 for seniors and students, including GST. Call the Theatre Box Office at 821-0090.