



Spotlight on Joel Ivany, Assistant Director

The Canadian Opera Company has hired a new assistant director to work on *La Bohème*. This is a prestigious position for a young Canadian director. Joel Ivany has trained and prepared and is ready for the challenge. He spoke with us about how his life experiences have shaped his work today.

Q: What is something from your early memories that informs how you work as a director today?

Joel: There were four of us growing up; an older sister, and a younger sister and brother. I was brought up on *Sound of Music*, *Oliver*, *Mary Poppins* and *Babes in Toyland*. We'd watch them over and over and over again. I think I get a lot of my ideas and theatricality from those early experiences.

Q: You have directed operas in Ireland and Italy for different companies. Is the COC any different? More exciting? More nerve wracking?

Joel: To be an assistant director at the Canadian Opera Company is definitely exciting. It is the biggest, most organized, hub of opera in Canada and definitely one of the best in North America. The bar has been set very high at this company and it's our job to strive towards that excellence. Directing opera in Italy and Ireland is very cool in its own right, but a different experience. To work for the COC was definitely a goal of mine as long as I do what I know I can do, I'll be fine.

Q: What is the most difficult part of being the assistant director?

Joel: As an assistant you really want to do everything you can to help out and at times that can be overwhelming. You have to let everyone do their own thing and support those that need it. There is no job description; you have to be willing to flow to where you're needed.



BIOGRAPHY: Stage Director Joel Ivany recently apprenticed under Tim Albery at the Canadian Opera Company for their acclaimed production of *War and Peace*. Directing credits this past summer included a new work, *Knotty Together* in Dublin, Ireland, *Hänsel*

and *Gretel* in Edmonton, Alberta and Haydn's *La Canterina* in Sulmona, Italy. His directing credits include such productions as: Copland's *The Tender Land*, Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret*, Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and associate stage director for the University of Toronto Opera School's production of Handel's *Ariodante*. This past January he was involved in collaborating and staging three Canadian premiere operas with orchestra that were performed in The Moot Courtroom. He is a recipient of numerous scholarships and grants through such funding bodies as the Canada Arts Council and Theatre Ontario. He has worked with directors such as Michael Patrick Albano, Jennifer Tarver and Joshua Major. Upcoming projects include apprenticing Paul Curran on his production of *Peter Grimes* with Washington National Opera and assistant stage director for the Canadian Opera Company's production of *La Bohème*. He holds a music degree from the University of Western Ontario and an artist diploma in Opera Directing from the University of Toronto's Opera School.

Q: Why do you like opera so much?

Joel: The roots of my music are from the Salvation Army. I was singing in choirs when I was four and went to music camps until I was 25. We would learn theory, composition, and technique and group ensemble. I played a cornet (trumpet) before quickly moving down the line and ending with a tuba. My experience in the Salvation Army led me to singing in choirs during high school and university. In university I discovered a passion for theatre. Opera is an incredible combination of the two: music and theatre, possibly the highest form of art. I like the challenge of singing and acting at the same time. (It can be more difficult than imagined).

Q: What are you most looking forward to learning from director Maer Powell?

Joel: I'll be watching to see how she communicates. Every singer/actor is different and the director's responsibility is to find out how to get the most out of each performer. I've heard so many good things about Maer and I'm also excited to hear what she has to say and to hear her interpretation and vision for the piece.

OUTSIDE OF OPERA

Joel learned a lot about humanity on a life-changing trip to South Africa. "I spent two days at an orphan children's AIDS hospital. There were 12 kids from six months to six years old. I got to feed them, change their diapers, and play with them, all the while asking why these innocent kids have to go through so much suffering. I spent time at a hospital and visited with men who were dying of AIDS and who denied it, thinking that they'd get better the next day. These were very sobering experiences that made me value the freedom we have in Canada to pursue the dreams and careers that we desire."



*Elena Kelessidi as Mimi and Bülent Külekçi as Rodolfo in La Bohème (COC, 2005).
Photo: Michael Cooper*