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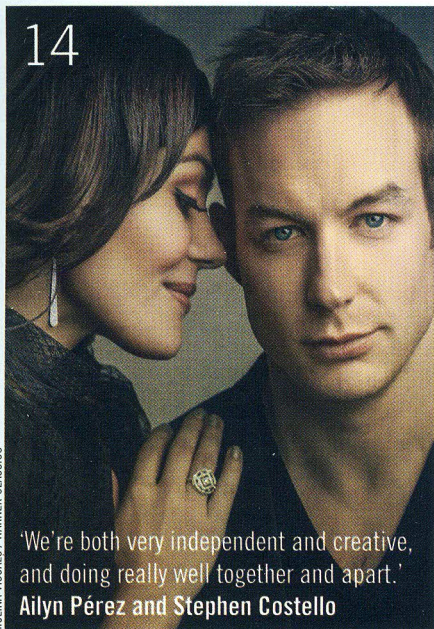
*Love duet*



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Ailyn Pérez and Stephen Costello

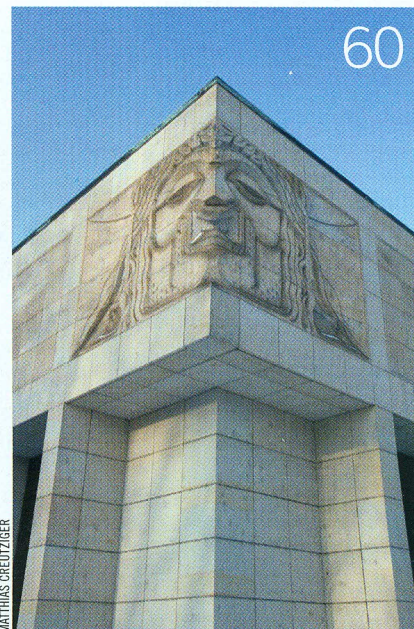


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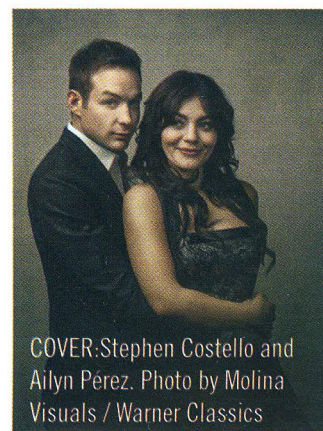
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COVER: Stephen Costello and Ailyn Pérez. Photo by Molina Visuals / Warner Classics

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## Welcome



BENJAMIN FAJONCEA

Shockwaves were sent through the opera world this spring when it was announced that San Diego Opera would be closing unless urgent and very large sums of money were forthcoming.

Several US companies have fallen victim to recession in recent years, most of them small-scale concerns operating, comparatively speaking, on a shoestring. New York City Opera, perhaps the highest-profile closure to date, had systemic problems dating back years that reached critical point when the recession struck.

San Diego is different: this is a major American opera company, classed among the nation's top 10, with a distinguished history, an experienced management, and access to one of the wealthiest and most cultured enclaves on the West Coast. What went wrong?

A picture has emerged in San Diego of a company living far beyond its means. San Diego Opera's board has displayed a need for control and a sense of entitlement that has verged on the unhealthy, preferring to shut up shop than admit the need for root-and-branch change.

Change is what many in the opera world most fear; but change brings opportunity. In America, the old paradigm where opera companies stage lavish productions in big theatres, supported by box-office revenue and rich patrons, is coming to an end. The wisest opera companies are taking a long, hard look at their role in the community and their relationship with their audience.

For example, in many US cities where schools are struggling with education cuts, the local opera company has taken on the role of educator, helping students to come to grips with subjects ranging from history, geography and philosophy (see Feedback on page 6 for a personal account of how this works). Elsewhere, companies are adapting their work to fit with modern lifestyles. Cinema relays, DVDs, online streaming, performances in 'non-traditional' venues are all part of the bigger offering that opera companies need to provide in order to keep their audience engaged. None of this should be a threat to an opera company's core purpose: at the heart of all this change there still needs to be a strong, creative ensemble of musicians and artists who tell powerful stories through great music and drama.

It is sad that some members of San Diego Opera's board would rather see 49 years of creative endeavour destroyed in an instant, than seek the means to adapt and survive. San Diego's plight isn't due to lack of interest from its audience. As *Opera Now* went to press, news was emerging of emotional scenes at the opera house as the curtain closed on the final performance. A petition to rescue the opera company had garnered 20,000 signatures overnight. Meanwhile, crowdsourcing was nearing its initial target, perhaps ensuring some sort of interim survival plan for San Diego Opera while a long-term strategy is being devised.

Opera companies are one of the great engines of creativity in our society, and they should be cherished as such. Ironically, San Diego's community is rallying to the cause at the very moment when it stands to lose an essential part of its cultural identity, built up over half a century.

Ashutosh Khandekar

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