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Exceptional year



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Performances

This is a shortened version of the Annual Report 2020.

Laila

”

A project of this quality and vision is critical for showing new paths for opera in our very challenging times, and Laila to me is a sign of hope, inspiration and quality.”

PETER MANIURA

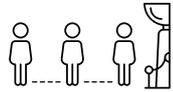
Director of IMZ
Academy and Chair
of the FEDORA
Digital Prize

Finnish National Opera and Ballet in brief

The principal purpose of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, as a national cultural institution, is to offer high-quality opera and ballet experiences to diverse audiences and age groups nationwide. We are meant to and we wish to improve and reform traditions and expertise in this field.

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet aims for the very highest standards in creativity and competence. While aspiring to be a source of national pride, we also strive to be an internationally prominent opera and ballet company. The Finnish National Opera and Ballet is also seeking to invest increasingly in corporate social responsibility.

The key values of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet are: High artistic quality; Cooperation; and Responsibility. We aim to maximise efficiency in everything we do.



EXCEPTIONAL YEAR

Operations continued through the year of the coronavirus

The year 2020 began favourably for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. We were performing repertoire that interested audiences, and in late February we even raised the prognosis of our box office revenue for the year.

All this came crashing down in March with the escalation of the coronavirus crisis, and on 12 March we were obliged to cancel all performances for the remainder of the spring. We began performances again in the autumn, only to have to suspend them again because of the second wave of the pandemic. These disruptions naturally resulted in a flurry of repertoire changes and postponements.

We immediately began to devise ways of working that would allow us to continue operations safely in these extraordinary circumstances. We performed risk assessments for every one of our functions and undertook safety precautions accordingly. Our overriding concerns in this planning were to ensure that everyone stayed safe, that rehearsals could continue and that we would be able to stage premieres. We attained all these goals.

In addition to the performance hiatuses in 2020, our box office revenue was severely affected by the fact that when performances resumed in the autumn, we were only able to fill the auditorium to half capacity for safety reasons.

More generally, a steady decline in national lottery funding in recent years has added uncertainty to the continuity of our government grant. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture appointed a working group to discuss the legal and financial status of national cultural institutions. We have a representative in that working group and are hoping to have our status and our funding enshrined in law.



”

Surprisingly, we achieved a great deal in this exceptional year, being one of the few opera houses worldwide to do so.”

The past year will go down in history as a period of uncertainty and difficulties because of the coronavirus pandemic. For us, however, it was also a year of team spirit, creative solutions and successes. When the pandemic brought all our performances to a halt in March 2020, we were not paralysed; instead, we decided to keep on going as far as the restrictions would allow us.

Despite the discontinuations of performances, we managed to produce a wide variety of high-quality repertoire in the course of the year. This was made possible by the commitment of our personnel to keep things going and by the new, safe work procedures that we adopted.

We also received strong public support, which motivated and obliged us to continue our work. In addition to our annual grants, the Ministry of Education

and Culture awarded us a grant of EUR 1.5 million as part of the coronavirus aid package for arts and culture. We are extremely grateful for this aid to our field.

I am really proud of how we managed to adapt to the extreme challenges that the past year brought us. I would like to extend my warm thanks to all our employees, who were pushed to the limit. I would also like to thank our faithful audiences and our Board of Directors and Supervisory Board, who supported us through these troubling times.

Although the impacts of the coronavirus crisis will continue to be felt for years, I am sure that the flexibility and creativity that we discovered will help us to weather future challenges too.

Gita Kadambi, General Director



Covid fan tutte

”

Many opera companies are attempting to come to coronavirus terms with our crazy times... For now, though, the Finns in their “Covid” set the Mozartean standard of turning laughter into earned tears.”

MARK SWED
Los Angeles Times

265

cancelled performances

We aim to safeguard continuing performances, for instance, by dividing technical personnel into separate opera and ballet teams, by introducing arrangements for smaller orchestras in opera and ballet productions and, failing all else, by performing ballets principally with recorded music.

In keeping with our values, we highlighted responsibility in our relations with all our stakeholders in the year of the coronavirus. We harnessed all of the expertise in our organisation for the planning of continued, safe operations.



Covid fan tutte

Our operations were governed by scenarios that were always kept updated with the most recent information. This allowed us to quickly identify the best practices to ensure the safety of our personnel and our audiences amidst shifting circumstances.

We were an initiator and a key participant in the performing arts network that devised national recommendations for safety practices during the pandemic; these were published in the summer. All our employees were trained to comply with these practices.



OPERATIONS

Digital offering increased in importance

The Finnish National Opera is a national arts institution and an opera and ballet company of high international calibre. As the only professional opera and ballet company in Finland, it is our purpose to reach out to diverse audiences and to serve society at large. Although performances at the Opera House form the core of our operations, it is important to us that we reach audiences of all ages beyond the Opera House through our outreach work, maintaining a nationwide presence.

Even though our performances were suspended for several months in 2020, we managed to produce 3 opera premieres and 4 ballet premieres, and a great deal of other high-quality programming. We had 136 ticketed performances with a total attendance of 68,170. Also, *Laila* was performed 339 times to groups of six people at a time. In the previous year, we had 271 performances with an attendance of 221,095.

We invested heavily in our digital offering in order to cater to our audiences while the Opera House was closed to the public. Our virtual stage, Stage24, reached a record number of viewers for live streams and recordings. The performances on the platform logged more than 1.5 million views, about seven times more than in the previous year. Also, the live stream of our opera production about the coronavirus spring, *Covid fan tutte*, attracted our largest audience ever for a single streaming event, more than 62,000 viewers on Stage24 and YLE Arena.

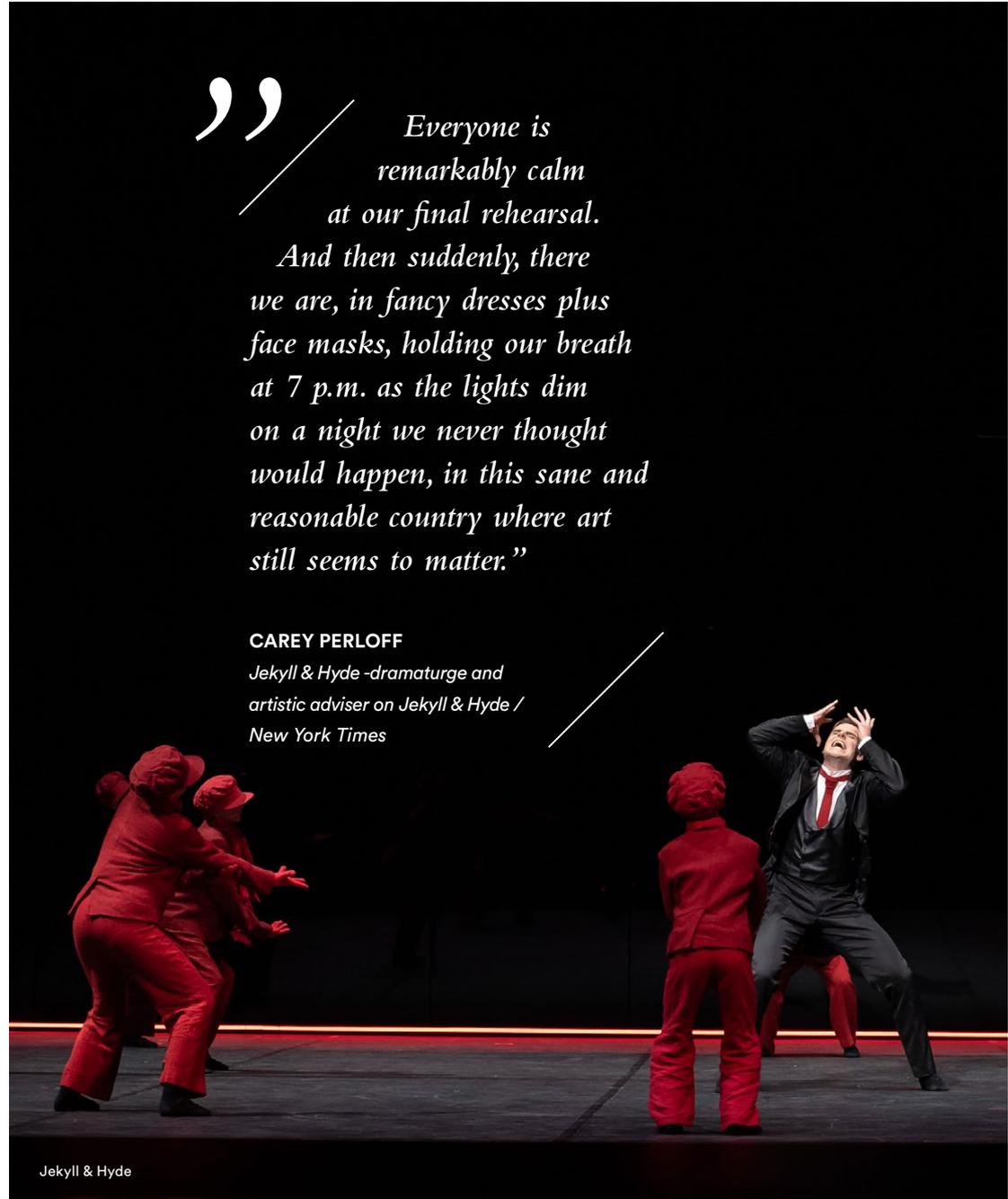
For information about the repertoire in 2020, see encore.opera.fi/en.

”

Everyone is remarkably calm at our final rehearsal. And then suddenly, there we are, in fancy dresses plus face masks, holding our breath at 7 p.m. as the lights dim on a night we never thought would happen, in this sane and reasonable country where art still seems to matter.”

CAREY PERLOFF

Jekyll & Hyde -dramaturge and artistic adviser on Jekyll & Hyde / New York Times



Jekyll & Hyde



84%

Opera House capacity relative to seats available*

* 100% capacity available only until mid-March. After that, only 50% of the auditorium was available due to safety precautions.

We were able to maintain our operating capacity throughout the crisis. Although we were obliged to suspend performances periodically, our workshops continued to work nonstop.



Because of restrictions on performances at the Opera House, we invested heavily in our digital offering in 2020.



Don Giovanni



Carmen

Despite the numerous repertoire changes and cancellations caused by suspended operations, we managed to produce two world premieres during the year under review: the ballet *Jekyll & Hyde* and the interactive work *Laila*.

3.5 million people reached digitally

Our Audience Outreach Department prepared online learning materials to support remote schooling in comprehensive and upper secondary schools. The materials for comprehensive schools were based on the ballet *Pippi Longstocking*, while the materials for upper secondary schools were based on the opera *La Bohème*.



PERSONNEL

Prioritising personnel safety

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet is a community of many cultures and top professionals in multiple fields.

In keeping with our strategic goal of offering meaningful experiences and unforgettable artistic performances, our employees must be enthusiastic, motivated and committed to our common goals. Our HR policy is intended to foster such an atmosphere by ensuring the wellbeing of our employees and providing them with opportunities for professional development.

In 2020, our HR efforts naturally focused on ensuring the safety of our employees through guidelines and through special arrangements such as remote work, separation of teams and rehearsing at home.

In order to safeguard the financial resources needed to ensure that we can resume performances once the pandemic situation eases up, we were obliged to undergo codetermination negotiations and to lay off personnel on two occasions in the course of the year.



548

employees

30

nationalities

100

job titles



We made use of technology in the design and rehearsals of productions, so that things happening at the Opera House could even be managed remotely from abroad.



We aim to ensure employee safety, for instance, by implementing safety guidelines and related communications and orientation, by reducing the size of teams working at the Opera House, by encouraging as many employees as possible to work from home and by performing safety audits.

Employees wore face masks and visors in duties where it was considered necessary in joint consultation between employees, occupational health care and occupational safety and health officers. Occupancy restrictions were defined for workspaces.

Technology also allowed most of our customer service employees to work from home. The number of employees on site was reduced to half, and safety was ensured with the use of appropriate personal protective equipment and safety measures.

A variety of risk management measures were introduced in job duties that could not be performed remotely. An example of this was that a partition was installed to divide the costume workshop into two cubicles.



Laila



Don Giovanni



The Merry Widow



Covid fan tutte



Ariadne auf Naxos

For information about the repertoire in 2020, see encore.opera.fi/en

OPERA



For information about the repertoire in 2020, see encore.opera.fi/en

BALLET

FINNISH NATIONAL OPERA AND BALLET

Helsinginkatu 58, P.O. Box 176
FI-00251 Helsinki, Finland
tel. +358 9 4030 21

COMMUNICATIONS

tel. +358 9 4030 2329,
press@opera.fi

www.oopperabaletti.fi/en
firstname.lastname@opera.fi

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MAIN SPONSORS

HELSINGIN SANOMAT

STOCKMANN

VARMA

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet is a member of Opera Europa.

”

At times, the entire ensemble transformed into rock musicians. I believe Mozart would have enjoyed this silliness.”

RISTO NORDELL
Suomen Kuvalehti

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Heidi Almi
(Finnish National Opera and Ballet)

EDITORS AND LAY-OUT

Elina Kaartinen,
Sanna Rantakoski,
Outi Kiviluoto
(Avidly)

PHOTOS

Stefan Bremer,
Mirka Kleemola,
Roosa Oksaharju,
Heikki Tuuli,
Sakari Viika,
Kari Ylätalo

FRONT COVER IMAGE

Covid fan tutte, Karita Mattila
Photo: Stefan Bremer

TRANSLATION

Notaatio Oy



OOPERA
BALETTI

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