





An Evening at The Lyric

The upcoming season for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City opens with world-renowned mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato performing one of her most celebrated roles, Cinderella, in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*. This extraordinary event represents a happy ending for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City's recent capital campaign and signals an opening story line for the organization's future.

DiDonato's appearance at the Lyric is evidence that the Opera's \$11.5 million endowment campaign, "Realize the

Vision," was a resounding success. The campaign goal – to establish an endowment to attain to higher levels of artistic expression – coupled with a desire to create a distinct and lasting reputation for the Opera, was clearly realized in this three-year campaign.

To understand the magnitude of DiDonato's performance at the Lyric, one should know that most of her appearances happen only on the world's major operatic stages. Of course, it helped that DiDonato is a Kansas City native, but that alone could not have made the connection possible. "Her fee is certainly among the top fees we have ever paid," said Lyric's general director, Evan Luskin. "Cinderella' is an example of the level of programming we'll be able to offer in the future." A substantial endowment—the first endowment campaign in the Opera's history—has turned mere possibilities into realized potential.

Founded more than 45 years ago, the original Lyric Opera of Kansas City was one of this country's first regional opera companies. Today the Company occupies an historic theater that has already lived several lives: a Masonic Temple; a Red Cross blood collection center during World War II; a performance theater, under two different names; and a movie theater.



In the 1970s the Kansas City Lyric Theatre (as the Lyric was called at that time), entered into a lease agreement with the building's owner. In the late 1980s the Lyric purchased and renovated the center into its present condition.

Offered Luskin, "Many years ago we explored the possibility of establishing an endowment. It was in the back of our minds for a long time." A timely gift from Mr. and Mrs. Robert P. Ingram proved to be the impetus for moving things from discussion to action. Their \$2 million Charitable Remainder Trust provided the lead gift to the Lyric.

A gift of this size and significance can often serve as a wake-up call to an organization. "When the Ingrams offered this gift they said they would like to see us set up an endowment. They believed others would want to be a part of it. This really got the ball rolling," said Luskin.

The Lyric board met the following spring to discuss the realities and possibilities of undergoing a campaign for endowment. Hartsook Companies was retained that summer to conduct a campaign assessment.

In the fall of that year, the board elected to retain Hartsook Companies and its founder and CEO, Bob Hartsook, to provide professional consultation for a \$10 million endowment campaign. Said Luskin "When we were considering professional consultants, we asked some of the major foundations. Several of them recommended Hartsook Companies."

Said Michelle LaPointe, Lyric's development director: "Bob helped us with committee selection. He told us what we should consider, whom we might ask to serve, and what type



of structure we should have. He gave us proven formulas and criteria and tailored the right questions we should be asking ourselves when putting a campaign committee together."

Within 12 months, the committee was discussing program enhancements in addition to the original \$10 million endowment. They began to realize that donors wanted long-term financial strength for the Opera, but they also were motivated by some short-term, quickly realized benefits. The Lyric had to decide how to present programming enhancements. Increase the number of productions to five or continue doing four even better? Their decision was to raise the bar on their four annual performances.

Board member solicitation took place behind the scenes prior to the public announcement of the campaign. Solid board support gave the Lyric the solid foundation needed to take the campaign to the community.

Acknowledged Joyce Holland, campaign co-chair: "We were fortunate to enter this campaign with a fresh perspective. We had not attempted a campaign of this size, so our reluctance kept us from pushing some gift solicitations prematurely. We started with the Lyric family—people we already knew had a strong interest in giving—and worked from there."

At the beginning of the campaign, a matching grant from the Missouri Cultural Trust paved the way for greater momentum. The grant would match 50 cents on a dollar. If the Lyric could raise \$1 million, the Trust would provide an additional \$500,000. However, the million had to be raised within four months.

“Sometimes a prospect would say, ‘I can’t give now (for this or that reason)’ or ‘I can’t give as much as I would like.’ But we were never turned down for lack of interest,” said Holland. After four months of strategic solicitations, they met the deadline and made the match.

On the heels of this grant, the Lyric was given another, more substantial matching opportunity by the Missouri Cultural Trust. Said LaPointe, “They invited us to attempt a second challenge of \$2,157,000 which would generate a matching gift of \$1,078,500. We had one year to complete that match.” Which they did.

A generous gift from Mr. and Mrs. Landon Rowland came in just as the campaign was closing—a million-dollar matching gift with half going to long-term endowment and half to immediate programming. Said LaPointe, “They asked us, ‘How would you like this gift to be given?’ Their flexibility in allowing us to use their gift as a matching opportunity opened up many new and exciting gift opportunities toward the end of the campaign.”

Offered Luskin: “A manager for the Dodgers once said, ‘Luck is the residue of planning.’ We saw that in this campaign. You hope for a lucky break, but you have to put yourself in a position to take advantage of it when it comes.”

“One of the most important lessons for me,” said LaPointe, “was Hartsook Companies’ philosophy of an Integrated Campaign. Bob kept telling us, ‘This kind of campaign strengthens your relationship with your donor base.’ I began to realize he was saying that the campaign was not separate from day-to-day development, it was a supplement to that. The campaign mentality has been integrated into the Opera. Even when the campaign is over, the work doesn’t end. This campaign has caused us to grow, but it was not a ‘one-time

event.’ Our annual fund, our donor relationships...everything is strengthened by having gone through the process.”

Another important aspect of the Lyric Opera mission is education. This element was strengthened significantly by the campaign for endowment. The Lyric provides programs for

music and arts education in schools and throughout the community. Their award-winning programs and activities include: Opera Heroines and Opera Heroes, Head Start with Opera, Opera for Captive Audiences, and Summer Opera Camp. A \$100,000 gift from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation for education was given to help advance these vital programs. Other family foundations interested in supporting arts and music education were also prompted to give similar gifts during the campaign.

Ultimately, the campaign came in \$500,000 over goal with \$10.5 million raised for endowment and an additional \$1 million earmarked for program enhancements. Said LaPointe, “We never had any doubt that we would finish, but we did have to stay fluid and flexible in the process. You have a timeline, but sometimes you need to make adjustments.”

Added Josh Sosland, campaign co-chair, “In any campaign, one must expect surprises—pleasant and unpleasant. There will be gifts you are confident about that don’t materialize as well as gifts you never expected. You can’t go into the campaign

thinking, ‘I’m only doing this if we get a gift from A, B, and C.’ It’s better to think, ‘It’s likely that we will receive a gift from A, B, or C.’”

While raising \$11.5 million is a boon to any organization, the campaign goal should never be primarily about raising money. The true goal lies in what the money will produce...what it can achieve. For the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, the ability to bring in world-class artists and musicians to provide Kansas City audiences with breathtaking performances, and an elevated stature for the Company, were reasons enough to undergo a major campaign. Like any fairy tale ending, one would expect this organization to live happily ever after. And why not? “Cinderella” is coming to the Lyric.



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Hartsook World Headquarters | P.O. Box 410046 | Kansas City, Mo. 64141 | Phone: 866.630.8500 | Facsimile: 866.630.8595
info@hartsookcompanies.com | www.hartsookcompanies.com



Nashville, TN | info@asrmedia.com