

# WHAT'S NEW

## FLASH! OPERAGOERS GO VIDEO

Word of mouth has always been the currency of choice for arts marketers, but in this age of ubiquitous social media the words fly faster every day. To capture some of those words **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** (OTSL) recently launched "Opera Stories Revealed: Share Your Story and Win," a contest designed to get opera audiences talking — and, ultimately, listening.



Aubrey Allicock from his Opera Story Revealed video. Photo courtesy of Opera Theatre of Saint Louis.

The rules of the game are simple: upload a video of yourself talking about your favorite opera experience. And though video competitions are not necessarily new in the opera marketing world, OTSL has definitely raised the stakes: in addition to tickets to the world premiere of Terence Blanchard and Michael Cristofer's *Champion* in Saint Louis on June 15, the grand prize also includes a trip to the 2013 New Orleans Jazz Festival, courtesy of Jazz St. Louis.

"If you've never been to an opera before, to hear everyone around you talking like an opera expert, it's easy to forget they weren't always opera experts," says OTSL Director of Marketing and Public Relations Joe Gfaller. "We were looking for a way to tell that story in a community-based way." While opera lovers of all ages were encouraged to submit, Gfaller acknowledges the potential for a generation gap. However, he sees benefits for established audiences from the voices of young operagoers, and is currently highlighting *Champion* with cultural-spotlight events in conjunction with young professional groups. Results from OTSL community engagement initiatives over the past two years have been encouraging — since 2011, attendance through their Young Friends program has increased 132 percent.

The contest was developed in partnership with KMOX radio, a longtime OTSL supporter, which also provided the online infrastructure to handle logistics for the contest at service levels designed to engage a 21<sup>st</sup>-century audience.

Gfaller has been pleasantly surprised by some of the stories revealed so far. "We're excited that many are simply coming out of the woodwork. They're opera lovers; they want to tell their stories." The response from the iPad generation has been encouraging, but so too have those from less-tech savvy patrons. One of Gfaller's favorite e-mails arrived with the following disclaimer: "I don't know what Flash player is," she began, "but here's my story."

— Genevieve Valentine

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