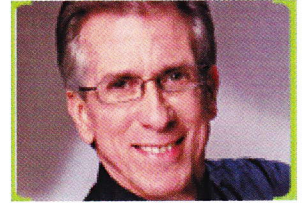


## Director Joel Revzen works to alter opera's reputation



Albert Ching  
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Joel Revzen, artistic director of Arizona Opera for the last three years, knows what you think about opera.

“There are so many misconceptions about opera,” he says. “A lot of people still think opera is fat ladies singing in a hot room with horns, in a language that nobody understands.”

He's not clueless, he understands. But that doesn't mean he isn't intent on changing your mind.

“None of that could be further from the truth,” Revzen counters, adding that performers are cast for their acting as well as their singing, and if an opera is in a different language, “supertitles” displayed in the hall broadcast the words in English.

Although many of these operas were written centuries ago, Revzen contends that they frequently take on a newfound relevance, like any great art.

“Everything has its own timeliness to it,” he says, specifically citing “Susannah,” which will close Arizona Opera's season in April.

“Especially with what we've been reading the last few days with the scandal in Washington. This is, in a way, the same kind of thing, because there's all these church elders professing to be very religious people, but what they're really doing is peering through the bushes while Susannah is bathing,” Revzen says.

Revzen and Arizona Opera, which opened its 35th season this weekend in Tucson with Verdi's adaptation of Shakespeare's “Macbeth,” welcome both newcomers and opera buffs to their shows.

“I can't tell you how many people have come to the opera for the first time and said, ‘Oh my God, it's nothing like I thought it would be. My wife dragged me and I really loved it,’ ” Revzen shares. “I try to appeal to as broad of a crowd as I can.”

This is considered at every level, even when deciding what shows will comprise the season.

“I try to create kind of a balanced meal, where out of five operas we offer three operas that are what we call ‘core repertory,’ ” says Revzen, referring to works by composers such as Puccini, Mozart and Strauss, that appeal to more traditional operagoers. So for the two other operas in a season, they're free to pick more unconventional fare (“Beauty and the Beast” and “Susannah” this year).

Arizona Opera doesn't just try to attract new adult fans, they also aim young, with a program that not only brings opera performances to school kids across the Valley, but also takes them backstage to learn about the production of an opera.

“It's been a hugely successful program,” Revzen says. “We're giving kids a broad experience of what opera is.”