
Arizona Opera's Revzen helped Met prepare epic 'War and Peace'

By Cathalena E. Burch

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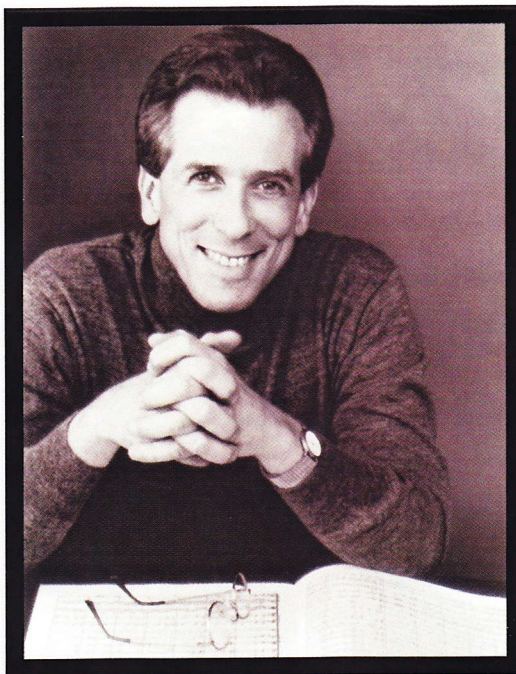


Photo credit: Christian Steiner

His name does not appear on the program, but if it were not for Joel Revzen, the New York Metropolitan Opera's mammoth production of Prokofiev's "War and Peace" might have had a bumpier road to the stage.

On the Radio

The Met's production of "War and Peace" will be broadcast at 10:30 a.m. Saturday on KUAT (90.5-FM).

Revzen, Arizona Opera's general and artistic director, spent two months prepping the production ahead of celebrated Russian conductor Valery Gergiev. Gergiev is conducting the work, which concludes its eight-show run at the Met on Jan. 3.

"Until Gergiev came in, (Revzen) conducted all of the stage rehearsals and the orchestral readings," said Craig Rutenberg, the Met's director of music administration. "He had everything in shape for maestro."

In fact, Revzen had the show in such good shape, Gergiev came nine days before opening night on Dec. 10 to lead the final rehearsals and put his interpretive mark on it.

"I know how (Gergiev) makes music. In addition to guest conducting for him (at the Mariinsky Theatre of St. Petersburg, formerly the Kirov Opera), I've sat in on his concerts and operas," Revzen said early this week from New York City, where he will remain until the final performance Jan. 3. "I took pages of notes, of little things to clean up and fix. I gave orchestra notes up until the first performance."

Revzen had a similar role when the Met mounted "War and Peace" with Gergiev in 2002. The revival, though, is much larger: Five acts, nearly four hours long (intermission included), 13 scenes, 68 roles sung by 52 soloists, 118 choristers, 41 dancers, 227 supernumeraries (non-speaking roles), 1,200 costumes — and a horse.

The production costs? As much as \$5 million.

For perspective, consider that on average Arizona Opera spends \$700,000-\$800,000 per opera.

"There are certain challenges to having that many people involved," said Revzen, who has been on the Met's conducting roster for eight seasons. "There are 65 titled characters in this piece. It's five volumes of scores. It's huge."

Revzen hasn't had much time to sightsee or socialize during his New York stint, but he has found time to network for Arizona Opera. He's nurtured existing relationships with Met singers and established a few new ones with singers who may soon grace our stages. He's auditioned singers, entertained visiting board members and talked up Arizona whenever he could. He plans to speak about Arizona Opera during a Dec. 26 national interview on Sirius satellite radio.

"My first priority and commitment is to Arizona," said Revzen. "That's what I do when I'm here. That's the reason I do this."

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