



**Selected Press Acclaim  
Fort Worth Opera Festival  
Seasons 2007-2011**

“Fort Worth Opera renewed its claim as one of America’s premier seasonal opera festivals.”

***Dallas Morning News, December 2011, Year in Review: Best Classical Music Performances***

“Four top-notch singers in the leading roles backed by a group of excellent subsidiary performers gave chilling new life to [*Il Trovatore*], Verdi’s ultrafamiliar gothic horror story. Strong orchestral playing, excellent scenic designs and effective stage direction added force.

***Fort Worth Star-Telegram, December 2011, Year in Review: Best Classical Music Performances***

“In May and June, area opera goers witnessed stage director John de los Santos’ brilliant twenty-first-century reimagining of Sullivan’s *Mikado*, as well as the hard-hitting, transcendent distillation of American culture (as embodied in Ginsberg’s poetry) in Glass’ *Hydrogen Jukebox*. Both of these amazing productions were part of the annual Fort Worth Opera festival, the brainchild of Fort Worth Opera’s visionary and admirably pragmatic general director Darren Woods.”

***Front Row, D Magazine, The Year in Classical Music, December 2011***

“Outstanding Design/Technical Accomplishment: *Hydrogen Jukebox*”

“Unique Innovation & Transformation: *Hydrogen Jukebox*”

“Favorite non-theater performing arts experiences of 2011: *Hydrogen Jukebox*”

***Theater Jones, Year in Review: Best Classical Music Performances, December 2011***

“Arts organizations that best weather difficult times tend to be led by charismatic figures with bold ideas and a knack for getting people — and funders — excited about them. Looking over the Dallas-Fort Worth classical music scene, I see only one leader who fits that description: Fort Worth Opera’s Darren Woods. He has turned what used to be an embarrassment of a provincial company into one drawing national attention as well as local excitement.”

***Dallas Morning News, 2012 Classical Music Forecast, December 2011***

“Fort Worth Opera Festival followed the precept that ‘Everything is bigger in Texas’ in selecting its standard-repertoire work for this season...amassing the season’s biggest orchestral and choral forces and most important, some grand-scale young voices [for *Il Trovatore*], FWO proved itself up to the considerable challenge...A talented ensemble of attractive young singers chanted, keened and sang Ginsberg’s lines of hope, disillusionment, love and cynicism...baring their souls and a good deal of their bodies as they journeyed across America’s history and geography. The singers were musically accurate, vocally well matched and fearless in their theatrical intensity...*Hydrogen Jukebox* was certainly a daring choice for this conservative community, but the audience sat rapt throughout...the [*Mikado*] staging was consistently lively and kinetic, abetted by the well-drilled chorus, which seemed to be having a wonderful time.”

***Opera News, September 2011***

“The 2011 Fort Worth Opera Festival reclaimed its place as a significant American spring-summer option. The surprise hit was the *Trovatore* (May 21), with five principal singers that would be welcome anywhere. With singing and acting like this, you don’t need fancy visuals.”

***Opera, October 2011***

“Kudos to the FWO for continuing to counter-program its main-stage standards with provocative material.”

***Art & Seek, June 2011***

“...Fort Worth Opera presented what is surely this year’s most significant area operatic event—and possibly the most significant theatrical event as well—with the opening performance of a new production of Philip Glass’s *Hydrogen Jukebox*.”

**Front Row, D Magazine, May 2011**

“Four years ago, the Fort Worth Opera made a bold move: it condensed an entire season into one weeks-long festival. It was a daring decision both financially and artistically. But, season after season, the Fort Worth Opera Festival under the guidance of general director Darren Woods has caught the international attention of critics and fans alike.”

**Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 2011**

“...that gift of gab has helped Woods transform a dysfunctional provincial organization into an opera festival drawing national and even international attention. That plus skills at raising dollars and pinching pennies and just getting a community to rally around a new and daring vision.”

**Dallas Morning News, May 2011**

“...*Caesar*, directed by David Gately, takes up the challenge of the work and delivers a strong product with some breathtaking moments...This production of *Julius Caesar* is one that should not be missed...and the performances are world-class.”

**TheaterJones, May 2011**

“If there was a doubt that opera is still relevant and fun, it was dispelled on Saturday night by the Fort Worth Opera company. From the lights, to the stage-hands, to the wonderfully conducted (Joe Illick) orchestra, everything contributed to a grand performance [of *The Mikado*] the entire company and city can be proud of.”

**Fort Worth Examiner, May 2011**

“I had to keep pinching myself Saturday night, to make sure I was actually sitting in Bass Performance Hall and hearing the glorious sounds filling — and I do mean *filling* — the room. Enrico Caruso famously quipped that the only thing you need for a great *Il trovatore* is four of the greatest singers in the world, and you’d be hard pressed to outdo the four Darren Woods has booked for the Fort Worth Opera Festival...this is one of the operatic thrillers of the year.”

**Dallas Morning News, May 2011**

“Fort Worth Opera’s palpable ongoing commitment to challenging new American works is exemplary.”

**Opera News, September 2010**

“When Darren Woods took over as general director of Fort Worth Opera, in 2001, the company was an artistic mess, and major funders and board members had deserted. With a combination of determination and wicked wit, Woods wooed both new and former supporters, gradually improved performance standards and in 2007 made the smart move to a spring-into-summer festival format. Daring programming, including two world premieres, and some major-league singers have garnered international attention and comparisons to the Santa Fe., St. Louis and Glimmerglass summer festivals.”

**Dallas Morning News, December 2010, Texan of the Year nominations**

“Fort Worth is now home to one of the best opera festivals in the U.S., with a mix of lavish classics and daring -- yes, daring-- newer works that are drawing national attention.”

**360 West Magazine (TX), October 2010**

“This production [*Before Night Falls*] could teach the Metropolitan Opera, and other big houses, a lesson: You don’t need a big budget to mount a good production, just wit and taste. “

**National Review/Digital, July 2010**

“Once a year, one of the great opera trifectas—make that really the only local festival-organized opera-palooza— sends out soaring arias to Metroplex opera lovers.”

**Fort Worth Star-Telegram, May 2010**

“Fort Worth Opera continues to out-cool most other arts organizations by leaps and bounds.”

**360 West Magazine (TX), May 2010**

"With Mozart's *Don Giovanni* as the opening salvo in its 2010 Festival, Fort Worth Opera's creative guns were loaded and they came out blazing. Saturday night's opening performance at Bass Performance Hall was as vital and pumped full of youthful vigor and masterful artistry as any a Mozart lover could hope to see. ...The fine cast assembled addressed the complex, non-stop challenges of the music and roles and gave a performance that thrilled the rapt audience and infused the opera with soaring vitality, capitalizing on its humor as well as its somber themes."

***Pegasus News, May 2010***

"Fort Worth Opera has become one of the country's premier opera festivals. No kidding. The casting for this year's *Carmen*, *Cinderella* and *Dead Man Walking* was as good as you'd get at Santa Fe and more consistent than at either Glimmerglass or St. Louis. And none of the other festivals could match the power and finesse the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra brought to the proceedings...Add Bass Performance Hall's superb acoustics, and the lively ambience of downtown Fort Worth, and you've got a winner...Give the credit to Darren K. Woods, who eight years ago took over the fragmented mess that was Fort Worth Opera."

***Dallas Morning News, June 2009***

"Since its inauguration in 2007, the Fort Worth Opera Festival has supplied some of the area's most memorable productions."

***Dallas Morning News, May 2010***

"That little gem in North-West Texas."

***Opera Chic, April 2009***

"Fort Worth is becoming known as a place where composers can get their new operas premiered."

***360 West Magazine (TX), April 2009***

"...the efforts of a brilliant creative team – conductor Christopher Larkin, director David Gately, designers Peter Nigrini and Claudia Stephens – made *Angels* a work decidedly worth seeing. And the cast, headed by veteran soprano Janice Hall and Erin Elizabeth Smith, delivered lines ranging from speaking to Sprechstimme to singing with amazing aplomb. ...one is grateful to FWO general director for his courage in bringing it to the festival."

***www.operatoday.com, June 2008***

"Like the original play and the mini-series, Fort Worth's 'Angels' utilizes the talents of a small cast in multiple roles. ...Like a shadow that disengages itself from its maker, 'Angels in America' is the tale of America's great shadow self, personified in this stunning and exceptional performance."

***EDGE Dallas, May 2008***

"Texas' 62-year-old Fort Worth Opera – it's a senior among American companies – is out to restore a proper balance, and the four productions currently on stage there in the FWO's second summer festival stress that this is no longer just another regional company, but an enterprise that has defined for itself a special identity through its commitment to fidelity, to composers' intentions, to perceptive direction and a finely honed sense of what it is that makes opera both grand and great."

***www.operatoday.com, December 2008***

"The performance itself was excellent. The opera was created with Lauren Flanigan in mind as *Frau Margot*, and she projected the character's gradual descent into insanity with great power. As Kara Sondstrom, mezzo-soprano Patricia Risley was as convincing and alluring visually as she was musically. Baritone Morgan Smith was excellent at Ted Steinert, as he sank helplessly into the maelstrom created by the two women. ...The orchestra, directed by Joseph Illick, supplied rich sonorous support. One hopes that this premiere will prompt further productions elsewhere..."

***American Record Guide 2007***

"Thomas Pasatieri's *Frau Margot* – given a near-flawless world-premiere staging by Fort Worth Opera in June – manages the impressive trick of making us care what ending will be given to a dead composer's unfinished opera. ...The orchestra sounded lush, polished and expressive under the caring leadership of Fort Worth Opera music director Joseph Illick."

***Opera News, September 2007***