



divergence vocal theater
classical vocal repertoire & interdisciplinary performance arts

a progressive attitude to repertoire selection, fearless contemporary staging, and an exciting fusion of interdisciplinary arts characterizes our non-traditional approach to classical vocal repertoire. the result: boundary defying performances featuring historic and new opera, art song, solo piano pieces, theater, dance, and multimedia arts.

www.divergencevocaltheater.org

Divergence Vocal Theater Supports



THE OTTAVIA PROJECT



A Note from Misha



I took a lot of artistic license with these works, that is a hallmark of Divergence Vocal Theater---thank you for your indulgence and for coming on this little journey.

If you are familiar enough with the music and drama to ask, "Why is Ottone singing Arnalta's aria?" or "The chorus is speaking Seneca's lines!" or "What's with the Bach-Busoni Chaconne at the end, it's 19th Century, for cryin' out loud!" or "Where is the harpsichord? And there are characters missing!" I am busted. May the Classical Music Police come and drag me away in chains. Come have a glass of wine with us, we need you as an Advisor & Muse!

There are several very fine baroque specialist companies in town, but Divergence Vocal Theater is a contemporary company, and inspiration for repertoire selection is primarily character driven, springing from many sources and time periods. Expect lots of contemporary music from Divergence as well as repertoire chosen from the rich tradition of Western classical music---old and new.

This production is inspired by my personal obsession with the character Ottavia/Octavia, and the company vision is motivated by my passion for (and infatuation with) classical vocal music, classical theater, and actor created theater techniques.

Actor/ensemble created theater is a special way of making performance work that in-part, relies on the director more as a guide, and where performance material and characterization is generated through a commitment to physical exploration, game-play and risk-taking. It is a time-consuming process that grants ownership of the creative process to the ensemble, and aspires to yield unexpected and exciting results.

I am also thrilled about the new translation created by Jenna Wallis for this performance. I feel that Jenna created a poetic, modern, yet nearly literal translation of the Italian. Having a stellar translation of these excerpts from Giovanni Francesco Busenello's beautiful libretto is a big treat.

A broader goal of Divergence Vocal Theater is to raise funds for humanitarian causes. In the spirit of this commitment, Divergence Vocal Theater made a small donation to AIDS Foundation Houston for this first performance. It is our hope to develop long-term relationships with organizations like AIDS Foundation Houston, and continue the tradition of coupling art making with relief for those in dire need.

Oh, yeah, one last note: sometimes, in opera, girls portray boys. Go with that.

THE OTTAVIA PROJECT

Synopsis

The Ottavia Project presents our story in a series of vignettes, following the events on Poppea's coronation day from Ottavia's laments to Poppea & Nerone's unification, and Poppea's coronation.

We open with Love, Virtue & Fortune appearing to Jean-Philippe Rameau's *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin, Suite in A minor*. Our Three Fates then settle down to watch the action. The People appear and give us a glimpse of humanity's plight through Seneca's beautiful words; and Ottavia's opening monologue is a glimpse into her noble and mournful character (*Prologue in sound & words*).

After a night of bliss together, Poppea & Nerone sing of their love as day is breaking. In Ottavia's chambers, she laments her life as "despised Queen" (*Disprezatta Regina*). We then see Poppea spurn Ottone, her previous husband, himself an heir to the throne (*Ad altritocca in sorte*). Nero appears with Seneca's words, giving us what the opera does not: a view of Nero's dark, intense, evil nature.

The opera's action hinges on a seemingly impromptu murder plot devised by Ottavia, who orders Ottone to disguise himself and kill his beloved Poppea (*Tu che dagli Avi miei*). The Ottavia Project's murder scene alludes to Love's role in the prevention of the murder, and gives the beautiful lullaby, *Amor, recoro a te*, to Ottone instead of Poppea's handmaiden (as in the opera). Nero appears and orders Ottavia's exile (*Delibero, e risolvo*); Seneca's words again reveal The People's riotous reaction to Poppea's ascension to the throne, and Nero's selfishness, pride and ambition (*Where is the people's might?*). Ottavia bids farewell to Rome as she is sent to board a ship for the distant island of her exile (*Addio Roma*).

The Ottavia Project's unusual epilogue gives voice once more to Ottavia through her final words in Seneca's play. Love, Virtue & Fortune appear one last time with Johann Sebastian Bach's *Chaconne in D minor from Partita for Solo Violin no 2*, arranged by Ferruccio Busconi.

THE OTTAVIA PROJECT

MUSIC & TEXT

L'incoronazione di Poppea (selections)

Music by Claudio Monteverdi

Libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello

Octavia Attributed to Seneca

edited by A.J. Boyle

excerpts appear by permission of Oxford University Press

with music of Johann Sebastian Bach & Jean-Philippe Rameau

L'incoronazione di Poppea selections in Italian with English supertitles

CAST

(in order of appearance)

The Dancers: Love, Virtue & Fortune Mechelle Fleming
Lindsey Magill
Brittany Wallis

The People Shelley Auer, Misha Penton, Michael Walsh
Poppea Kinga Skretkowicz-Ferguson
Nerone Shelley Auer
Ottavia Misha Penton
Ottone Michael Walsh

CREATIVE TEAM

Artistic, Stage Direction, Movement for
Singers, Concept Misha Penton
Piano & Musical Direction Stephen W. Jones
Choreography (Love, Virtue, Fortune) Toni Valle
Lighting Design & Technical Direction Kris Phelps
Video Technician Natasha Manley
Film Raul Casares, Dave Nickerson
Film Art Direction Misha Penton
Prologue & Epilogue Text Misha Penton, Jenna Wallis
Octavia Text Adaptation Misha Penton, Ensemble
L'incoronazione di Poppea Translation &
Supertitles Jenna Wallis

PRODUCTION

Production Specialist Lynn Birdwell
Front of house, reception Terry Vantine, Alicia Zimmer

THE OTTAVIA PROJECT

What You'll Hear....

*Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin, Suite
in A minor: Gavotte avec les Doubles de la
Gavotte*

Jean-Philippe Rameau

Stephen W. Jones, piano, Love, Virtue,
Fortune

Prologue in sound & words

Signor, deh, non partire!

Disprezzata Regina

Ad altritocca in sorte

Nerone speaks

Tu che dagli Avi miei

Amor, recoro a te

The People, Ottavia

Poppea, Nerone

Ottavia

Ottone, Poppea

Nerone, The People

Ottavia, Ottone

Poppea, Ottone

Murder & Mayhem:

*Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin, Suite
in A minor: Gavotte avec les Doubles de la
Gavotte*

Jean-Philippe Rameau

Stephen W. Jones, piano, ensemble

Delibero, e risolvo

Where is the people's might?

Addio Roma

Pur ti miro

Nerone

The People, Nerone

Ottavia

Poppea, Nerone

Epilogue:

Ottavia's threnody

Chaconne in D minor from Partita for Solo

Violin no 2, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach

Arr. Ferruccio Busconi

Ottavia

Stephen W. Jones, piano, ensemble

The performance is approximately 1 hour with no intermission

Please join us immediately following the performance for an after-party, meet the company, and mini fundraiser, featuring sitar and santoor dreaminess from Aaron Ray Hermes.



Shelley Auer (*Nerone*)

Shelley Auer, mezzo-soprano, has been performing in opera and musical theater in Houston for the past six years. Most recently, Ms. Auer performed the role of Dinah in *Trouble in Tahiti* at Bayou Bend with Opera Vista. This summer she performed with Etc Theater in Galveston the role of Amy in *Company*. Other recent roles include Mary in *Cabildo* at Bayou Bend and the Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd* with HCC Southwest. Last fall, she performed two Frank Loesser review shows and two original musicals at University of Houston. Ms. Auer has been a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus for five seasons. In 2006, she was chosen as a Madrigal Singer in *Manon Lescaut* with HGO. From 2005-2006, she performed

several roles with HGO's Opera to Go, an educational outreach program. She performs weekly at First Presbyterian Church in Houston. Currently Ms. Auer teaches at Houston Community College and Alvin College. She is also the current Artist Liaison for Opera Vista. Before moving to Houston in 2002, Ms. Auer received her Masters in Vocal Performance at Baylor University. She then moved to Ft. Worth, Texas where she taught and performed with the Fort Worth Opera Chorus and Educational Outreach Program for three years.



Kinga Skretkowitz-Ferguson (*Poppea*)

Soprano Kinga Skretkowitz-Ferguson, a native of Lodz, Poland, has recently sung Amor in Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, at the Chicago Opera Theater under the baton of Jane Glover. Previously she was seen at the Chicago Opera Theater in *Nixon in China*, *Death in Venice*, *Il viaggio a Reims*, and *Agrippina*.

Since 2007, Kinga has performed with Opera Vista Houston, the company she helped to create. In March 2006, she made her New York debut singing Marie in Donizetti's *La fille du regiment* with the NY Opera of the Highlands. Other roles from her repertoire include Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Leïla in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Madame Mao in *Nixon in China*, *Poppea* in *Agrippina*, Contessa in *Il Viaggio a Reims*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. On the concert stage, she has recently performed Solveig in Grieg's *Peer Gyn* and Juliet in Tchaikovsky-Taneyev *Romeo and Juliet* with the Marion Philharmonic, *Exsultate*, *Jubilate* and Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch* at Indiana University, and *Voices of Poland* for the Chicago Humanities Festival. Kinga received her Masters and Performer's Diploma in Voice from Indiana University, where she sang Fiorilla in *Il Turco in Italia*, Adele in *Die Fledermaus*, Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel*, and Nicoletta in *The Love for Three Oranges*. Kinga is a winner of the 2001 Marcella Sembrich Vocal Competition, a recipient of two Kosciuszko Foundation scholarships and a Rossi-Lemeni Memorial Award in the Society for Arts and Letters competition, and a Fellow of the Paul Daisy Soros Foundation for New Americans.

Kinga holds an Artist's Diploma in Piano from the Lodz State School of Music, Poland, an MA in English from the University of Lodz, and an MBA from the University of Lyon. She is currently Executive Director of *Ars Lyrica Houston*.

Stephen W. Jones (*Music Director, The Ottavia Project*)



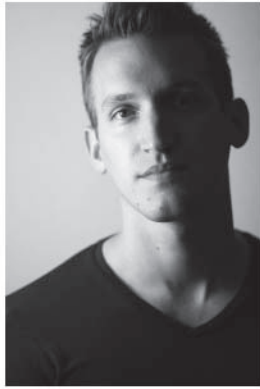
Misha Penton (*Ottavia*)

Artistic Director, Divergence Vocal Theater

Mezzo-soprano Misha Penton's diverse performing career includes opera, concerts, composition, choreography, and theater. Most recently, she created the roles of Isabelle and Brooklyn in the world premieres of *The Masque, a Grim Little Entertainment* by Roger Keele at Lone Star Lyric Theater Festival and James Norman's opera *Wake...* with

Opera Vista. Her frequent appearances as a featured soloist with Opera Vista include *An Evening of Kurt Weill*, a tribute concert to Bernstein, and *Les Chansons Macabre*. Upcoming Divergence Vocal Theater projects include the world premieres of *Incline, O Maiden*, a monodrama for mezzo soprano and chamber orchestra, and a dramatic song cycle, both by James Norman. Ms. Penton will also be featured in an upcoming festival of new works with Opera Vista. As an interdisciplinary performing artist, Ms. Penton has released original music recordings and composed music for contemporary dance performances at DiverseWorks Arts Space, the University of Houston Center for Choreography, and for New Orleans contemporary dance company, Happensdance. She has spearheaded projects such as her adaptation of George MacDonald's children's classic, *At the Back of the North Wind*, a fusion of music, dance and text, which appeared in Houston's Big Range Dance Festival. Ms. Penton is currently collaborating as librettist with composer James Norman on *Call Me North Wind*, an expansion of her George MacDonald performance piece, and a new dramatic song cycle based on tales from *The Decameron*. Ms. Penton sang with Mercury Baroque in their production of *Pygmalion* and she is a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus. She is a featured guest artist on the 2007 release of *On the Strings of the Rain* with pianist and composer Roger Keele and members of the Houston Symphony and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra.





Michael Walsh (*Ottone*) *Mr. Walsh's performance is generously underwritten by Newberry Campa Architects.*

Michael Walsh, baritone, received his Master of Music degree from Rice University. The recipient of Rice's Carlton Prize in Opera, Mr. Walsh has been a studio artist with Central City Opera where he covered Dancaïro (Carmen) and sang Archie Kramer in Hoiby's *Summer and Smoke*, which was broadcast on National Public Radio's 'World of Opera.' A former apprentice artist with Amarillo Opera, Michael has performed as Fiorello (Il Barbiere di Siviglia), Wagner (Faust), and the Sergeant (Manon Lescaut) with Opera in the Heights. As a member of Houston Grand Opera's Opera to Go!, Michael created the title role in Mary Carol Warwick's *The Velveteen Rabbit* and also sang Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*. As an apprentice with Utah Opera, he sang Hlas (Jenufa), Bolito (Illusions), and performed in concerts of operatic highlights with the Utah Symphony. Last autumn, Michael was an artist-in-residence with Amarillo Opera where he sang recitals throughout the Texas panhandle region. He has sung with Ars Lyrica and also in Mercury Baroque's productions of *Pygmalion* and *Dido and Aeneas*. He created the role of Jason for the premiere of *James Norman's wake...* and sang in *Trouble in Tahiti* for Opera Vista. He is a current member of the Houston Chamber Choir, is a staff singer at Christ Church Cathedral, and is an adjunct faculty member of LoneStar College, Montgomery. He is also the company baritone for Opera to Go! and is presently appearing in touring performances of *Strega Nona*.



Mechelle Flemming (*Dancer, Love*)

Mechelle Flemming, born in Houston, TX, grew up in London, England and has been dancing since she switched her college major from Biochemistry to Dance, in 2004. Since that time, Mechelle has been a part of the University of Houston's pre-professional dance group, ENSEMBLE and has presented work at the American College Dance Festival from 2006-2008. Her work last year was selected for the 2007 American College Dance Festival Gala. Along with her studies at U.H., Mechelle has also studied at the Laban Center in London. She has had the pleasure of working with Jennifer Wood (SUCHU), Psophonía Dance Company, Amy Ell, Teresa Chapman, with whom she performed for at the Cunningham Dance Studio in NYC in 2007, Toni Leago Valle, Douglas Dunn and is currently a member of Travesty Dance Group based in Houston, under Karen Stokes. With their first showing at Big Range Dance Festival 2006, Mechelle has begun collaborating with her friend Catalina Molnari in their new venture, The Living Room Project, showing work at events such as Diverseworks' 12 Minutes Max, and this year's Offshore Technology Conference (OTC). Presenting solo work outside the university, Mechelle has shown at Big Range Dance Festival 2007/2008, Merging Modes 2007 and at the University of Houston 2006-2008. She plans to continue her artistic adventure individually and collaboratively through The Living Room Project and to further her knowledge in choreography at the University of Houston. Mechelle will also be starring in 'Tetris,' January/February 2009, a new dance work by Toni Leago Valle.

Lindsey McGill (*Dancer*)

Lindsey McGill graduated from the Houston Ballet Academy under the direction of Ben Stevenson and Clara Cravey. She then danced with Dayton Contemporary Dance Company 2. Lindsey returned to Houston and has had the honor to work with many artists and dance companies in Houston most recently Jane Weiner's Hope Stone Dance, Michele Brangwen Dance Ensemble, Becky Valls and

Company, Toni Valle, Mechelle Flemming, and is a former member of Dominic Walsh Dance Theater. Lindsey has also choreographed works commissioned by Dominic Walsh Dance Theater, DiverseWorks' 12 Minutes Max series, and the Big Range Dance Festival. In addition to her dance projects, Lindsey is Studio Manager and a ballet instructor at Hope Center.

**Brittany Wallis** (*Dancer*)

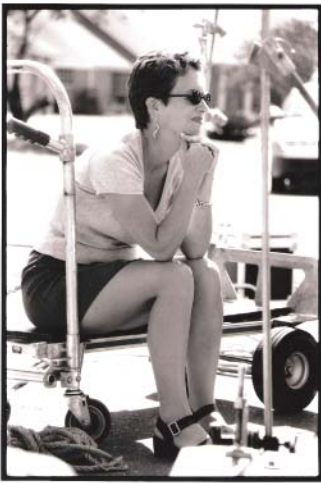
Brittany Wallis is a native Houstonian. She started her training at Shelly Power's School of Dance, and continued her studies at Houston Ballet's Academy in 1994. She danced professionally with the Houston Metropolitan Dance Company from 2001-2005 and recently joined Hope Stone Dance Company in 2007. Some of Brittany's performances include The Liz Lerman Project, Festival De Danza (Cordoba, Mexico), Jazz World Congress, Psophonia's Phantasia, Dance Houston, Texas Week-end of Contemporary Dance, and the Illumination Project.

**Toni Valle** (*Choreography: Love, Virtue, Fortune*)

Toni Leago Valle received a BA in Theatre from the University of Houston in 2000. Ms. Valle has received two Individual Artist Grants from Houston Arts Alliance to produce *It's All Relative* in 2002 and in 2007 for her third evening-length work, *Tetris*, to premiere at Barnevelder in January 2009. Ms. Valle premiered *CRACKED* in 2006 as a recipient of the DiverseWorks Artist Residency. Her choreography has been seen at DiverseWorks, the Jewish Community Center of Houston, University of Houston, San Jacinto College and throughout the city of Houston. As a dancer, she has performed with Becky Valls & Company, Dancepatheatre, Psophonia Dance Company, Suchu Dance, and Travesty Dance Group. Ms. Valle is the Project



Manager of Dance Souce Houston.



Lynn Diane Birdwell (*Production Specialist*)

As an executive producer, Lynn Birdwell has consistently provided award-winning, complete production services for the international and domestic US market in high end commercial, corporate, and documentary film/high definition production. With Bird House Productions, she facilitates production support in the studio or on location, in Texas and Mexico, for clients who may be based anywhere on the globe. Formerly agency broadcast producer with Lopez Negrete Communications she managed a variety of award-winning national and regional production work, including the 2003 TV and radio campaigns for Texas' Reliant Energy, and International Goya Foods, along with continual work for Wal-Mart, Fiesta Markets, and other brands. As Producer, and then executive producer of

commercial film production company Rio Bravo Pictures, from 1993 to 2001. Managing commercial film projects as well as broadcast feature stories, corporate communications, both live and animation, she also oversaw business affairs and management. Lynn represented Rio's New York and Houston offices to an international client base presenting commercial directors and cinematographers from the US and Mexico. More than 300 of her projects garnered awards, including Tellys, Addys, Worldfest, Communicators, and Matrix. Credits include agencies Leo Burnett, Ogilvy Mather, J. Walter Thompson, The King Group, Reister-Robb, LatinWorks, BVK/Meka, Music World Entertainment, and clients Shell, Hyundai, Honda, Pepsi, Time Warner Cable, Citgo, and Toyota. Born in Austin, Lynn was raised in Louisiana and California, and now resides in Houston. She studied Linguistics at UH, and holds an executive MBA from UT Austin.

Kris Phelps (*Lighting Design*)

Kris Phelps, Lighting Designer, holds a Bachelor of Environmental Design from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She has designed for rock bands, performance artists, theater, opera, and numerous choreographers, dance companies, and organizations. Among them are Dance Salad, Illumination Project, Pink Ribbons Project and Dance Source Houston's "Tapestry of World Dance" and "Weekend of Texas Contemporary Dance". Also, Ad Deum, Michele Brangwen Dance Ensemble, City Ballet, Farrell Dyde, Amy Ell, FLY Dance, Hope Stone, Houston Met and Met Too, Sarah Irwin, Priscilla Nathan-Murphy, Sandra Organ Dance Company, Leslie Scates, Several Dancers Core, jhon stronks, and Becky Valls. Her lighting for FLY was seen across the U.S. and Europe, including 10 performances at the Kennedy Center in 2004. Kris made her Mexican debut in 2006 lighting the world premier of Several Dancers Core's evening length "Corazon Abriendo" in Chiapas and Tabasco. She subsequently toured it to Atlanta and Houston. Nationally known choreographers she has lit works for include Robert Battle, Steven Boyd, Peter Chu, Salim Gauwloos, Pattie Obey, Eddy Ocampo, Jason Parsons and Katarzyna Skarpetowska. Opera credits include productions for young audiences with Opera To Go. In theater, Kris lit over a dozen plays for Infernal Bridegroom Productions. She designed for the Ensemble Theatre the past two seasons, and was honored to receive the "Best Lighting Design" award for both 2007 and 2008. She returns in early 2009 for two upcoming productions. This is her first design for Divergence Vocal Theater. She is very pleased to be involved.

Advisors & Muses

Kathleen Kaun, Rice University, Shepherd School of Music

Katherine Ciesinski, Eastman School of Music

Dave Nickerson, The Power Barge Corporation

Lynn Birdwell, Birdhouse Productions

Sponsors

The Power Barge Corporation

Newberry Campa Architects

Triple-S Steel

Birdhouse Productions

Raul Casares

In-kind Support

First Cumberland Presbyterian Church

Forshey Piano

Dominic Walsh Dance Theater

KUHF

The Feldenkrais Center of Houston



divergence vocal theater

In Gratitude, from Misha

A huge thank you to the love of my life, Dave--for all the things you are. To my close circle of support: Lynn, Raul, Troy, Rene, Toni, Neil, Shelley, thank you; and last but very-not least, a monster thank you to my hyper-talented cast of singers for the ridiculous amount of work you put in to make this happen, and for your eagerness to help me get this out of my head and onto the stage. Stephen W. Jones' remarkable talent, patience, generosity, enthusiasm, and willingness to go a bit out on a limb for me, in no small way made this production possible: thank you, you rock.

A big thank you also to Kathleen Kaun and Eric Melear for their support and incomparable knowledge and talent.

And a very, very special thanks to Katherine Ciesinski whose inspiration is without measure.

More thanks to: Amy Tanner and Ed Benyon of AIDS Foundation Houston, Kinga Skretkovicz-Ferguson, Kris Phelps, Jennifer Decker, Managing Artistic Director of Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company, David Brown of Spacetaker, MaryBeth Smith of The Feldenkrais Center of Houston, First Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and Dominic Walsh Dance Theater from whence the wings came.



divergence vocal theater

classical vocal repertoire & interdisciplinary performance arts

A progressive attitude to repertoire selection, fearless contemporary staging, and an exciting fusion of interdisciplinary arts characterizes our non-traditional approach to classical vocal repertoire. The result: boundary defying performances fusing historic and new opera, art song, solo piano pieces, theater, dance, and multimedia arts.

www.divergencevocaltheater.org

Check our website often for updates and info about our March 2009 production, and a brand new site coming with the New Year! Please join our mailing list by signing our lobby guestbook or emailing info@divergencevocaltheater.org.

Join Us!
Donate to Divergence!

Visit our donation table after the performance
or email: info@divergencevocaltheater.org for information on donor levels and DVT
Salon Concerts in your home.

Divergence Vocal Theater is a Sponsored Artist with The Field (www.thefield.org). Please consider making a tax deductible donation to Divergence Vocal Theater via The Field.

The Field is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization serving the New York City performing arts community and beyond. Contributions made to The Field and earmarked for Divergence Vocal Theater are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. For more information about The Field contact: The Field, 161 6th Avenue, New York NY 10013, (212)691-6969, fax: (212)255-2053, www.thefield.org. A copy of The Field's latest annual report may be obtained, upon request, from The Field or from the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

Affiliations & Friends



divergence vocal theater

Check it out!:

Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company--upcoming production:

Compleat Female Stage Beauty

February 12-28, 2009

Midtown Art Center

www.mildredsumbrella.com

Lone Star Lyric Theater Festival

2009 Summer Season!

Women! Wome! Women!

One act operas of Poulenc, Pergolesi, Pasatieri, and Bizet.

www.lonestarlyric.org

Divergence Vocal Theater is a
Sponsored Artist with The Field



Divergence Vocal Theater is psyched to
be a Culture 365 member of
Spacemaker.org - Culture when you
want it!

